Vista-ready laptop review

May 2007 Volume 20 Number 05 Free

HUB
DIGITAL LIVING

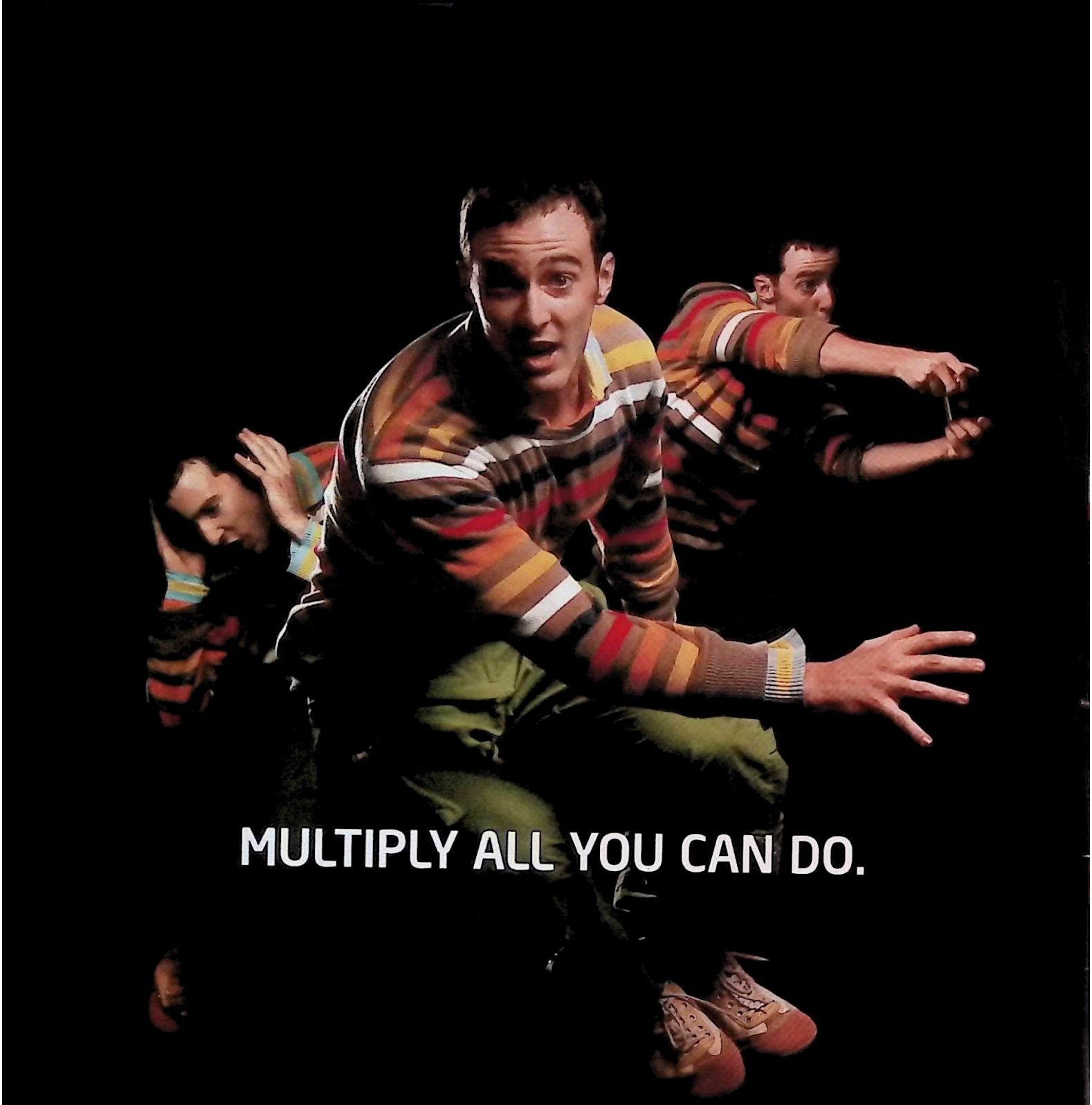
Wireless inkjet printers and media players

For gamers...
Second Life
7 top websites
RTS head to head

The new Online
Interactive, Informative, Immediate
Hubcanada.com 2.0

iPhone 101

www.hubcanada.com



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intel Core™2 Duo inside™

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Mio™

DigiWalker

Take It Personally.

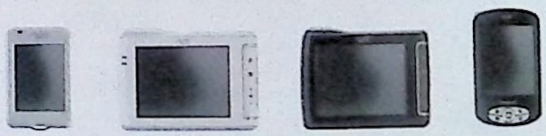
Actual Size
2.32" x 3.35" x 0.74"

Mio DigiWalker™ H610

Personal GPS Navigator and Digital Entertainment Player

The Mio DigiWalker™ H610 is a truly *personal* GPS navigator and media player - *personal* because it's about the size of a cell phone; *personal* because it has separate navigation modes for walking, biking and driving; and *personal* because it lets you enjoy hundreds of your movies, photos and tunes as it helps find your destination. So, pick up an H610 from a retailer near you and *Take It Personally*, wherever you go.

It's where you're going.



H610 C310s C710 P550

Windows CE

STAPLES that was easy.

Office DEPOT

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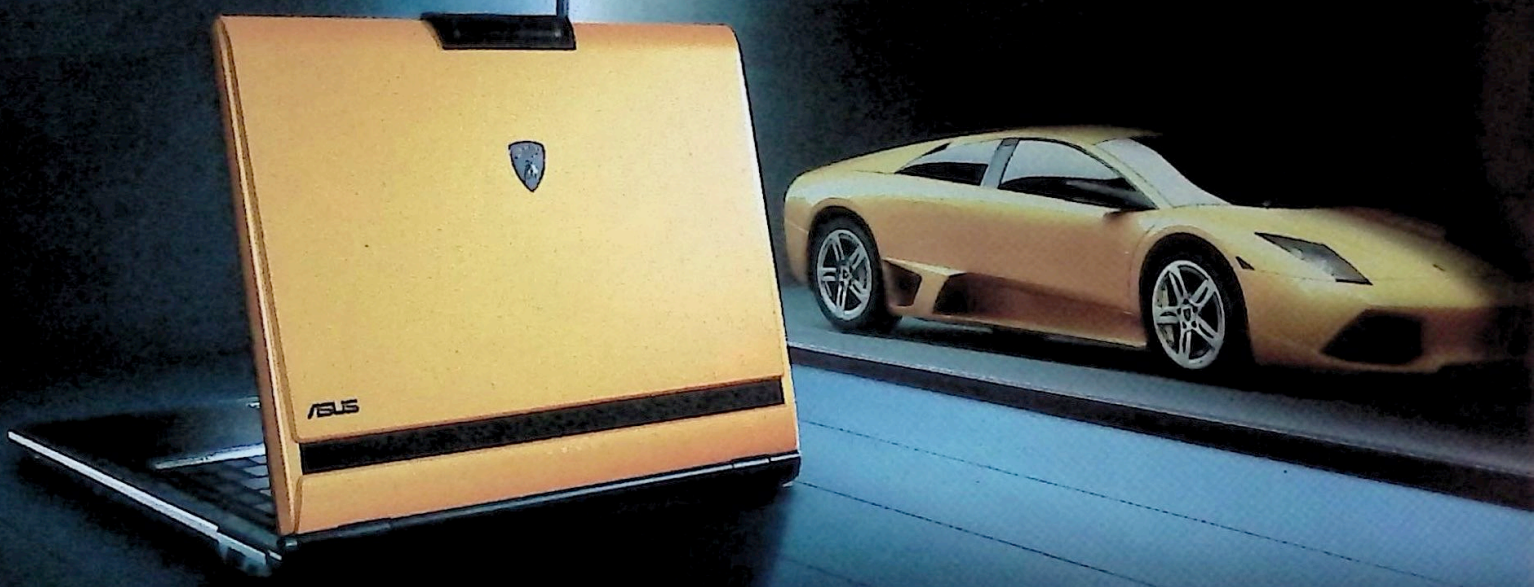

ASUS recommends Windows Vista™ Ultimate.

Windows Vista Ultimate

Sensational Counterpart

Touch the gleaming hood and feel momentum break free from under your hands. Flick on the light and behold the world as it turns to you. Swipe the key, get comfortable in the hand-fitted leather seats and as the engine roars to life - get ready to speed ahead. ASUS-Lamborghini VX2 offers more performance, more possibilities with the latest Windows® Vista™ operating system.

ASUS-Lamborghini Notebook Series preinstalled with Windows Vista™ Ultimate lets you enjoy your entire music collection throughout your home. Just select your favorite tunes or playlist from your PC, and get your groove on!

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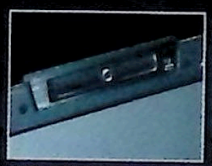
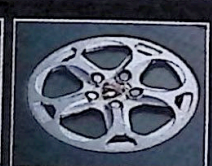


High-resolution swivel webcam

Privacy protected with fingerprint reader

Leather-bound palm rest with exquisite stitch detailing



Wheel-rimmed fan lid for cooling ventilation

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- Genuine Windows Vista™ Ultimate
- 15.4" Widescreen Display (WSXGA+, 1680x1050)
- NVIDIA GeForce Go 7700 512 MB VRAM
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VX2-AK007G (yellow) VX2-AK008G (black)

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intel Centrino Duo

Core™2 Duo inside™

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Editorial

iPublishing 101

In this issue, you'll see some information about the revamped hubcanada website we are launching this month. You'll also find in the future a lot more cross-fertilization of editorial content – what might be treated as one story in print could evolve into an entire series on the web. That's the potential benefit of the web – not replacing magazines, but creating new synergies to engage readers.

Like it has with so many traditional business sectors as well as individual pursuits, the Internet has fundamentally altered the magazine industry. Back in those rabid days, when it looked like the Internet was going to gobble up the physical universe and fortunes were made on the strength of a 45-second elevator pitch, it was easy to believe that anything old would soon give way to a new virtual version. It seemed like magazines, newspapers and broadcast media were all doomed because electronic versions of that content could be developed without huge printing or delivery costs.

Today, we no longer believe that the sky is falling on our old universe, but neither are we dismissing the Internet as a marginal medium or passing fad. Something new is most definitely emerging, but it's neither analog fish nor digital fowl. And as both denizens and spectators of this emerging world, we are also having to sort through what we as consumers really want and the best way to get it.

The music industry had one of rudest awakenings to the Internet age. It thought it was in the business of selling containers. Only when it became possible for consumers to get at individual bits of the content in a mix and match way did the industry begin to realize its fundamental business model was wrong. So now they're embracing the buck a tune model like they invented it – and in a way, maybe they did. There must have been some delighted aha! lights going off in record executives' heads when they realized they could sell every song in their catalogue as a single without incurring huge production costs.

The book industry, on the other hand, has some borrowed time for two reasons (although it faces other problems). First, trying to read a full-length novel on a monitor is nothing if not aversive. When 200 dpi paper white screens become reality, maybe the physical book will have some real competition, but then there's a second reason that gives books extra protection. Many readers love the experience of the book – the weight of it, the artistry of the typography, even the smell – which adds to the experience of discovering the story on the pages. I don't think it's coincidental that there is a renaissance in book binding and paper making today – which is a celebration of the book form itself.

The relationship magazines and periodicals have to the Internet is all over the map. If you take a magazine like National Geographic, the relationship includes possessing the physical thing. How many garage sales have you gone to and seen pristine collections of magazines like that going back decades in many cases? National Geographic's website doesn't compete with the magazine or make it less viable. If anything, it adds positively to the experience readers already have.

On the other hand, few people have anything but a purely functional relationship with something like the telephone yellow pages or a buy-sell magazine. Here, an online directory can largely replicate a publication, but it's never going to entirely replace it. If I'm in a strange city, the fact that I can look up an address or phone number on my cell phone's web browser is great. If I'm at home, it's just as easy to pick up the directory – it's all about the convenience, not the technology.

With our family of publications – HUB: Digital Living, HUB:ce and hubcanada.com – we're trying to build something you can have a richer relationship with. Are we succeeding? I'm sure you'll let us know either way.

Enjoy the issue. David Tanaka, Editor-in-Chief

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HUB

DIGITAL LIVING

Volume 20 : Number 05

Editorial

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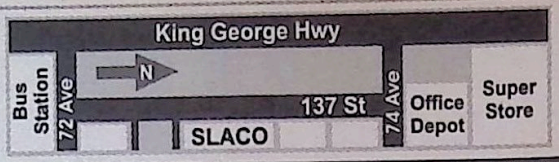
SLACO COMPUTER



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6-Channel 5.1 Sound Card O/B
BenQ P010 PS/2 Keyboard
Logitech Optical Wheel mouse
17" P4-ATX USB2.0-Front Case
10/100Mb Ethernet Card O/B
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19" LG L194WTX Wide Screen LCD
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Celeron-S775 2.66G/3.3G/3.46G.....45.9/69.9/89.9
Pentium-4 S775 3.2/3.4/3.6G.....96.9/106.9/226.9
P4 Dual-core 2.8/3.0/3.2/3.4G....112.9/155.9/179.9/204.9
Core 2 Duo E6320(1.86G)/E6420(2.13G).....214.9/239.9
Core 2 Duo E6600(2.4G)/E6700(2.66G).....288.9/389.9
Core 2 Quad Q6600/QX6700.....909.9/1199.9
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PC-133 SDRAM 16 chips 128/256M.....32.9/44.9
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24/7 Photography

To say that digital has changed photography is a vast understatement. What's happened to the photography industry has been nothing short of revolutionary. Computer hardware companies like Hewlett Packard and Epson, software companies like Adobe and consumer electronics giants such as Panasonic, Sony and Samsung have planted their flags firmly on the turf that was once the exclusive playground of a handful of photography specialists like Canon, Fuji, Kodak, Leica, Nikon, Olympus and Pentax. The field is much more crowded than it used to be – and more competitive.

For photography hobbyists, digital has had a major impact too. Digital means that we can pursue our interest in photography to the ends of the earth, thanks to computers and the Internet. It also means that anyone can now have a 24/7 relationship with photography.

This relationship can happen on many levels, but three main ones stand out: buying, learning and sharing. In Canada, mail order has been a perennially popular way to get new photo gear. The Internet has allowed us to comparison-shop 'til we drop on a global scale. For example, several weeks ago, I tried out a relatively obscure piece of photo processing software from a Japanese software developer. I liked it so much that after the trial period I went to its website late one evening and purchased the full version for 16,000 Yen. The software key arrived by email in less than a minute, and I just got my charge card bill, which shows the converted cost in Canadian dollars of $162.

But the global 24-hour shopping centre works both ways: Canadian retailers can also tap into markets beyond their physical locations. For example, when you visit the Henry's (a large photo retailer based in Toronto) site, the first decision you make on the splash screen is whether to shop in Canadian or US dollars.

In terms of learning, as many of you already know, there are countless sites devoted to photography, and most include some sort of educational component, be it a basic tutorial on image editing, a description of a photographic technique or an equipment orientation. Much of this is free, accessible any time and served right to your home office, easy chair or wherever you compute. Caveat emptor of course, as a lot of information out there is bogus or incomplete, but on sites that have established credibility, what you can learn for no cost is astonishing. And on some sites, for a nominal membership fee, you can get access to some serious tutorials.

Some sites will also list sessions happening in the real world, such as photo safaris with well-known professionals. Before the Internet, these might have been advertised just locally or regionally, or in one or two select photography magazines, but now any photographer with an Internet connection can find out about them. Anyone who remembers the '80s might recall those little "learn to be a photographer" correspondence course ads that sometimes appeared in magazines. How quaint from today's perspective.

Flickr is today's hot example of the third impact – sharing. But photo sharing sites and the photo communities they created thrived long before Flickr. Like other special-interest online communities, photo-sharing sites allow users to explore a common interest – photography. But within that broad activity, you can take twists and turns to follow whatever topic you want to explore. In Flickr, for example, you have the basic organizing structure called the tag, which is further refined into clusters. So, from your general interest in a topic like architecture, you can drill down into more

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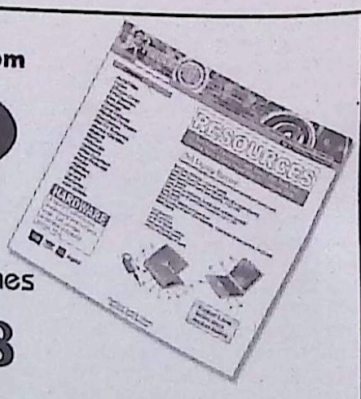

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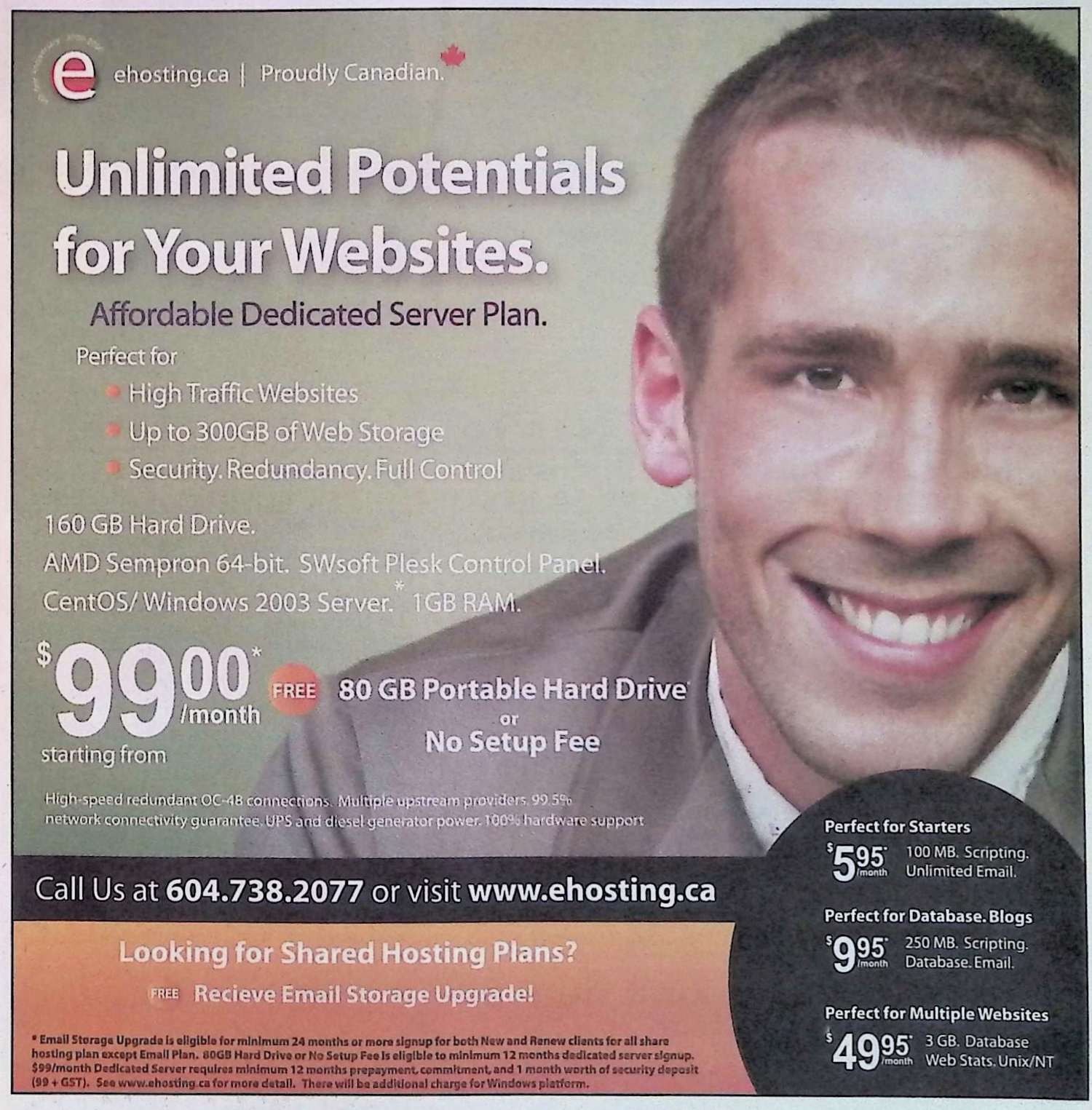
specific aspects like skylines or the architecture of a specific city, or a photographic theme like reflections from glass-faced office towers. And you can post your own photos for others with an interest in your topic to enjoy.

There have never been more people looking at more photos from more photographers. Any photographer can hold an exhibition of his or her work online, and anyone can be a critic. We've seen computer technology democratize other endeavours too. When desktop publishing software hit the scene, suddenly anyone with a few hundred dollars had access to the tools of a graphic artist. But it soon became clear that without an understanding of graphic arts principles like design aesthetics and typography, the tools could be used to produce some very ugly brochures. It also followed that more people became informally schooled in those principles, whether they worked in the field or not.

Online photography is following a similar path. People can be inspired by the really great images they see online, and they can also develop a critical eye to recognize some of the elements that make a great photo and see the shortcomings in their own work. I know I'm constantly surprised at how many outstanding images I come across during a casual browse through a photo site. And I'm certainly inspired to do better in my own work.

By David Tanaka



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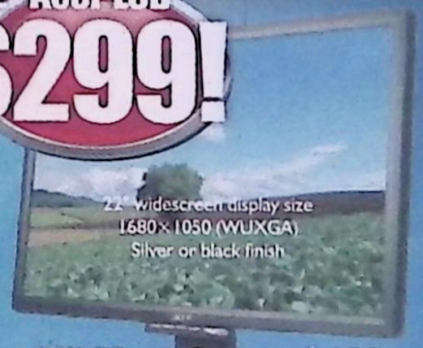

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DV Or Not DV

What You've Got is Not What You See (WYGINWYS, or "wig-in-wise")

Stop me if you've heard this before, but one of the most common questions I get about digital video goes something like this: "How come the picture looks so good in the camera, and so terrible on my home theatre screen?"

My first answer: Blame the inventors!

When TV first appeared in our living rooms 50 or 60 years ago, a group known as the National Television Standards Committee was in charge. For many reasons - some technical, some economic - it went with a TV system that was disadvantaged from the start. So much so, that the acronym NTSC eventually came to stand for "Never the Same Colour."

There's nothing really fixed about a TV image. It can be purposely adjusted using your TV's built-in contrast, colour, tint or similar controls. It can change in ways beyond your control, especially in older tube TVs, as the image quality "drifts" subtly over time due to heat build-up, electrical resistance, general tube wear and tear, and so on.

Even with today's high definition TV and technical oversight from the new ATSC (Advanced TV Standards Committee), there are many variables affecting picture quality. Some 18 different DTV standards or formats exist. Each one has a subtle affect on image fidelity, and certainly switching from one format to another can affect the picture as well.

For example, one common error many video hobbyists encounter is mismatched aspect ratios. The DTV standard allows for 4 x 3 (standard, or square) or 16 x 9 (widescreen) images.

You want to display images in their natural or native size, and you want to choose the proper aspect ratio when playing video. Putting a 4 x 3 camcorder image on a 16 x 9 home flat panel will result in abnormally squat (or, heaven forbid, fat) people.

Back off, Jack

Regardless of your TV's aspect ratio, its overall size will impact your viewing experience. There is a recommended minimum distance between an HDTV set and its viewer, roughly two or three times the diagonal measurement.

So, if you own a 50-inch widescreen, you should be sitting 100-150 inches away (eight to ten feet or more, or between 2.5 and 4 metres) for the best picture viewing. If you sit too close, the individual scan lines (and picture elements, or pixels) that make up the TV picture will be visible; they won't form a seamless image. If you are too far away, well, you lose the impact of big-screen TV.

Not just the dimensions, but the lighting conditions of your viewing environment are important. Many TVs are bright enough to work well in a fully lit room, but there are good reasons to reduce the viewing room's overall light intensity (and to adjust brightness and contrast settings on the TV).

It's a much more theatre-like environment when the lights are down or dim. Most displays and many projectors will last longer with lower output settings. Burn-in or screen damage can be minimized with lower contrast screen settings.

If you're worried about eyestrain, you can always put a low-output (25 watts or so) lamp behind your TV, so you're not looking at a screen that is uncomfortably brighter than its immediate surroundings.

Managing your image

The factory or default settings that most TVs ship with do not truly reflect real viewing environments; TVs are set up for showrooms and retail stores, not family rooms in people's homes. Whether onscreen menu-driven selections or actual knobs and buttons, you should use the controls your TV offers to get a picture that best matches your tastes and viewing situation.

For example, many TVs ship in a high-contrast mode (you'll see "blooming" or "blossoming" of very bright objects on screen, while detail in shadows and darker areas will disappear) that looks too harsh right out of the box.

You can reduce the contrast to increase shadow detail and minimize blooming, but avoid washing out the picture (dark areas should be black, not grey). You should be able to see detail in dark and bright objects (folds in a white gown, texture in a man's dark suit, etc.). On plasma screens, LCD panels and LCD projection TVs, set the contrast as high as you can without seeing white objects tinted by another colour.

Contrast controls may also include picture, brightness or even white and black levels, so be prepared to use them in tandem, adjusting one and then the other until the image is the way you want it.

Sharpness (sometimes called "detail" or "peaking") controls add or subtract from the TV image's overall crispness or sharpness by adding or enhancing artificial details, such as sharp edges, hard vertical lines or areas of complex visual information. Turn this control down until halos around objects or exaggerated vertical lines disappear.

Colour intensity (aka saturation, or chroma) controls help adjust the amount of colour in an image. TVs should be adjusted so that red objects or colours on screen do not "bleed" into other areas of the picture. Natural flesh tones are usually the easiest to adjust by, as we all know instinctively what the human countenance should look like: too much colour, and a person can look sun-burned; too little colour, they look pale, even sickly.

Tint or hue controls adjust the actual colour displayed. Again, healthy orange-pink flesh tones are easiest to recognize. Improperly adjusted controls will show a face as green, or even purple. It's tempting to say that tint can be set from red fire engines, green playing fields or blue skies – but which red, how green, deep or light blue? That's why the face is one of the best TV references.

One of the best, but not the best.

Technical reference charts and approved colour bar displays are the best references for what a TV picture should look like. (Anyone who remembers the old TV show known as the "Indian Head" test pattern, take a bow!) Hard copy reference charts are available in some photo/video specialty shops; digital test patterns can be downloaded from the Internet.

More demanding home theatre and HDTV aficionados will want to check out some of the reference DVDs available on the market, such as the AVIA "Guide to Home Theatre" disc from Ovation Media with its video calibration and display set-up tools. The DVD Acquisition and Development Group offers the "Digital Video Essentials" tool, and Silicon Optix offers the HQV Benchmark DVD for evaluating not just image display devices, but DVD players and video processors as well. The Imaging Science Foundation not only offers a Calibration Wizard disc, but in some situations, it will send out a technician to help set up TVs and home theatres.

There are even more answers to that oh-so-common question, and there are lots of helpful tips, great techniques and new technologies available so that video will look even better on your home TV screen than it does in the camera itself, so stay tuned.

By Lee Rickwood

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Lexmark's wireless gambit

"The next big thing in inkjets is wireless," declared Jeff Willard, vice-president of worldwide marketing for Lexmark's consumer printer division. He made the statement during a global media event the company held at its Lexington, KY headquarters in late March. Lexmark gave journalists from the Americas, Europe and the Asia-Pacific a sneak peak at its entire 2007 inkjet printer product line made up of a dozen new models, including inkjets and inkjet-based three-in-one and four-in-one multifunction devices. The first round of products was launched in mid-April, and the fall lineup will be announced in August.

Throughout the event, wireless inkjet printing was Lexmark's inescapable message, and Willard gave a snapshot of the reasoning that led the company down this product development path. He said in 2007, sales of notebook computers are projected to grow by 23 percent, and wireless adoption will grow by 31 percent. Meanwhile, printers are expected to grow by a measly two percent.

Notebooks mean computing can happen anywhere, and people are moving around the house, he noted, but connecting wirelessly to devices like printers is still complicated and expensive. So, by developing a line of wireless inkjets that are easy to connect to and affordable, Lexmark expects to revive the printer market by catching the double wave of mobile and wireless. Three quarters of the inkjet products the company will introduce this year will have 802.11 wireless capability.

What does affordable wireless printing mean? In the spring line up is the Z1420. Selling for US$79.99, Lexmark is billing it as the least expensive wireless inkjet on the market. The most affordable three-in-one Lexmark announced is the X4550, which has an SRP of US$119.99. To make it easy, Lexmark has taken a menu-driven wizard approach, which walks the user through the steps of wirelessly connecting to the printer or multifunction.

In the past, Lexmark's printer models have been a patchwork of designs, but this new line-up sticks together as a recognizable family – and an attractive one. The main printer bodies are made of a glossy white plastic with silver coloured end caps and accents, or brushed aluminium on higher-end models – Holy iPrinter, Batman! (and yes, Lexmark does ship Mac drivers with its printers).

Beneath the pretty skin are a number of technology improvements. On low-end models, the colour printhead size has been increased from 0.1 to 0.25 inch, and on higher end models, the swath goes from 0.25 to 0.5 inch, which translates into faster colour printing speeds.

With more people printing photographs, the issue of print permanence has become a concern and Lexmark has both dye-based and pigment-based ink sets that have long permanence ratings. Its Evercolor dye inks are rated at 75 years, while the Evercolor 2 pigment inks have a permanence rating of 100 years. Also, to address the digital photography market, some of Lexmark's new line will sport multi-function card readers, colour LCD screens and six-colour photo ink sets.

Lab tours

A large part of the event was devoted to lab tours. Here, we were able to see some of Lexmark's research labs in action, including the quality control area, a colour lab where researchers subject prints to accelerated fading using very bright light sources, a soundproof chamber where printer noise is studied and a chemical analysis lab where RoHS compliance is monitored. RoHS refers to a directive adopted by the European Union in 2006, which restricts the levels of certain hazardous substances in the manufacture of electrical and electronic products. These include nasties such as cadmium, hexavalent chromium, lead, mercury and two polybrominated compounds used in flame retardants. Because Lexmark uses a variety of suppliers for its printer components, it needs to maintain a constant testing program to ensure that the final product that bears the Lexmark name is RoHS compliant.

The spring lineup

Z1420: Lexmark's entry-level wireless (supports 802.11g) inkjet. Output is an impressive 24 pages per minute for black and 18ppm for colour with resolution up to 4800 x 1200 dpi. This model will take an optional photo cartridge for six-colour image printing. The company also introduced the Z1320 – no WiFi, but the lowest priced printer in the spring line-up.

X4550: Lexmark's entry-level WiFi-enabled three-in-one multifunction printer. The rated output is 26 ppm for black and 18 ppm for colour with maximum resolution of 4800x1200 dpi. This model also accepts a photo cartridge for six-colour printing, and has a multi-slot memory card reader for PC-less photo printing. The copy portion permits a resizing range of 25-400 percent, and a one-touch button allows PC-less copying. The scan portion supports 48-bit colour scanning and the unit also comes with optical character recognition software.

Below the X4550 Lexmark also has the new X3550 three-in-one (WiFi is optional through an add-in module) and the X2550 three-in-one (no WiFi, no card readers and slower print speeds).

By David Tanaka

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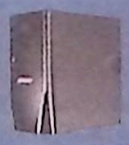

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iPhone 101

What you need to know about the must-have gadget of the year

A strange thing happened at this year's Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the largest consumer technology convention held each January in Las Vegas. Without question, the most-talked about high-tech gadget was the just-announced Apple iPhone. Um, so why is this so odd, you ask? The iPhone wasn't even at CES – instead, Steve Jobs unveiled the eagerly-anticipated smartphone about 900 km away in San Francisco, at Macworld.

But let's face it, the hype swirling around the iPhone is justified; in April, Apple announced it had sold its 100 millionth iPod (the first model debuted in 2001), making this product not just a popular portable gadget, but a must-have cultural icon. The iPhone promises to be a major evolutionary step forward by folding in long-awaited communication, computing and online functionality to all of its entertainment options.

While unconfirmed at the time of writing this, Rogers Wireless will be Canada's exclusive carrier of the iPhone since it operates on the GSM wireless network. Cingular will carry the phone in the U.S. beginning in June.

The following are the pros and foreseeable cons of the iPhone so you'll be well versed in what it can – and cannot – do when it debuts this summer.

The good

The Apple iPhone features a large 3.5-inch widescreen display that is completely touch-sensitive. So imagine using your finger to flip through all your music using the new Cover Flow feature, which lets you browse your library by seeing album artwork. When you stop on an artist you like, you tap again to open the track list for that disc, and then tap again to begin playing. While listening to the tune, you can resume flipping through your album covers to see what you'd like to add to your on-the-go playlist. Cool, huh? It's not unlikely users will be able to download music directly to the iPhone via its cell or WiFi connectivity (more on this in a moment).

Of course, a big widescreen display means it's also ideal to watch all of your video content. In the U.S., users could download TV shows and movies through iTunes (yes, we're still waiting for this here in the Great White North). Video controls are also handled with the flick of a finger – just tap to play, pause, flip forward or back, or adjust volume.

As the name suggests, the iPhone is also a phone. In fact, it's a quad-band world phone. To begin a call, tap your address book, which is synced with your Windows PC or Mac, and then tap a contact to begin dialing (or you can use the onscreen number pad). Call someone regularly? Add them to your Favourites list for easy access. Use your finger to merge contacts together for an on-the-fly conference call. "Visual Voicemail" is a neat feature, as it lets you listen to recorded messages in any order you want – just like email. Send text messages with the help of the predictive QWERTY keyboard.

Love photos? The iPhone doesn't just let you view pics while on the go – you can now take them too, thanks to the integrated two-megapixel camera. The iPhone is said to have a built-in sensor, so it knows to flip the image for you when you tilt the screen from, say, portrait to landscape view.

Possibly the most exciting part of the iPhone, and one we know the least about at this point, is all the computing and Internet functionality. We do know the iPhone has built-in WiFi for wireless broadband-like web surfing via its Safari browser, which lets you zoom in on a page by using your finger. Pick up your email with an HTML-based email client or view maps, satellite imagery and directions with its Google Maps software. Customize your home screen with Widgets, those small applications that give you handy info at a glance, such as real-time weather, stock info or whatever.

The bad

By now, you're probably drooling at all of the iPhone's features – and we don't blame you – but there are a few things you should know before you ditch your existing phone.

For one, it ain't gonna be cheap. In the U.S., the iPhone will be US$499 (4GB) or US$599 (8GB), plus a two-year carrier commitment. Sure, it's a convergence device that replaces your phone, iPod and PDA, but c'mon people, this is as much as a freakin' laptop.

Secondly, the lack of a tactile keyboard may be a problem for those used to touching buttons to place a call. A "soft" keyboard might mean a slower typing experience, a less accurate one – and quite difficult to use for those who are visually impaired. And what happens if the screen is dirty or scratched?

One of the biggest points of contention is that unlike a PDA, where you can download and install literally thousands of applications from the Net, the iPhone will have a "closed" architecture, meaning Apple will control what you can have on your device. Yes, that's right – no outside applications allowed.

Finally, like the iPod, the iPhone will play iTunes songs loaded with copy-protection (some call it "crippleware"), restricting where you can listen to the music you purchase. But in April, Apple announced it would also begin selling DRM-free (digital rights management) songs from EMI this spring, so let's hope this trend continues, allowing music lovers to choose where and how they listen to their purchased tunes.

By Marc Saltzman

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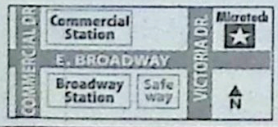

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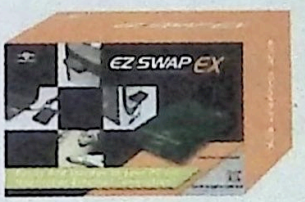

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CF-W5 is one tough book

Panasonic's durable, stylish ultralight

There was a time when notebook computers were fragile flowers – look at them wrong, and they'd break down. When Panasonic adopted the Toughbook name for its notebook line in 1996, it was not just a marketing statement – it was the company's line in the sand, declaring extra ruggedness would be the standard build for all its notebooks. As a result, Panasonic is one of the very few big-name brands you'll consistently see alongside the niche brands that market to the resource sector, police and military and other industries that give their computer gear a very hard time.

When it comes to notebooks, rugged is a relative concept. A notebook that's tossed around with a salesman's sample kit will have a relatively easier life than one that sits in the cockpit of a military tank, and you find this sliding scale described with terms like fully rugged, semi-rugged, durable, etc. There are perils that rugged computers, however defined, will try to address. These are all the factors you'd expect to find in notebook hell: drops and hard knocks, vibration, crush forces, water, dust, chemicals, humidity and temperature extremes, etc.

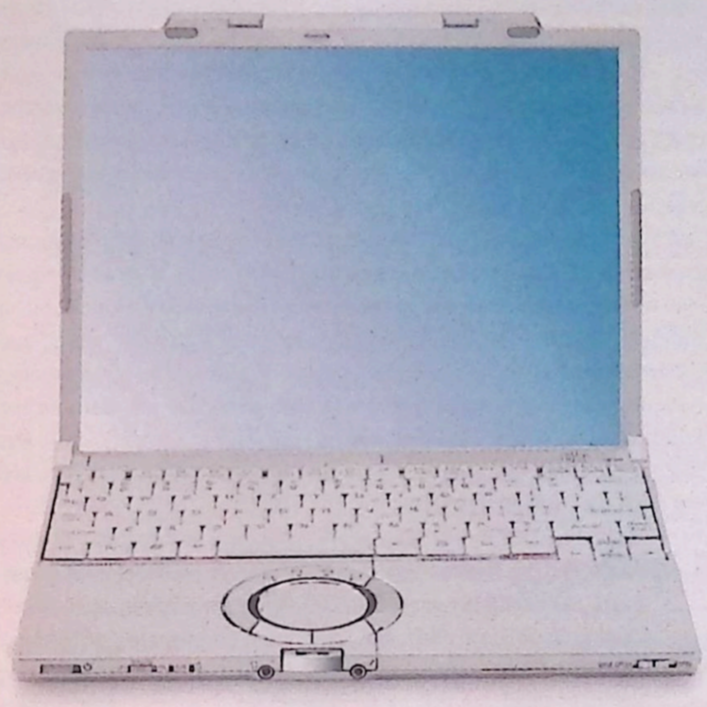
At a minimum, Toughbooks are designed to give extra protection to two main subsystems: the screen, which is expensive to replace, and the hard drive, which holds the most valuable stuff – your data. The semi-rugged CF-W5 uses a magnesium alloy case, which Panasonic says is 20 times stronger than ABS plastic. The hard drive is mounted in a shock absorbing gel. The CF-W5 has a drop rating of 30 cm (about a foot).

Being an ultraportable means it is also very light (1.2 kg) and compact. It measures 21 cm deep by 27 cm wide and the wedge shape is 2.7 cm thick at the leading edge and 4.6 cm at the hinge. Out of the 12.1 inch display, you can get a respectable XGA (1024 x 768) resolution. The expansion and communication options are what you'll typically find on notebooks: VGA out connector, one PC Card slot, an SDHC memory card slot, two USB 2.0 ports, Ethernet and modem jacks, audio in and headphone jacks. The Centrino badge means that it carries Intel's WiFi chip (supports 802.11a, b, g), and a switch on the front edge of the machine allows you to turn the radio on or off. Another switch allows you to turn the optical drive on or off. The DVD burner handles DVD-R, DVD+R, DVD-RW, DVD+RW as well as DVD-RAM. Most notebook drives will use either a pop-out tray or a slot for media, but the CF-W5 has a hinged lid built into the right side of wrist rest that opens to reveal the optical drive spindle.

Even though this is a very small notebook, the keyboard is quite decent. The keys are full width, although more oblong than square, so it takes more precision to avoid inadvertently hitting a key in the row above. The biggest annoyance for me was with the shorter than normal space bar, so I found I often hit the adjoining ALT key. The thin keycaps make the keyboard look somewhat insubstantial – until you start typing on in. It is rock solid, with none of the deck flexing you often encounter on low-end notebooks. In fact, the entire chassis is remarkably rigid. The screen lid, on the other hand, is flexible – I twisted it through a couple of centimetres of deflection

and it never felt like anything bad was going to happen. The trackpad is circular and this gives the CF-W5 a unique (and to my mind, quite attractive) appearance.

The notebook uses an ultra-low voltage Intel Core Solo processor, clocking at 1.2 GHz. It's not the fastest notebook around, and 512 MB of standar RAM will further hamper performance if you have several applications ope at once. But to give this some context, what most of us do most of the tim – office applications, email, web browsing – barely challenges a gigahertz plus processor. I found the performance in Photoshop Elements 5 was goo even when working with some 12 megapixel images that had a couple o layers. Given that this is not a machine that anyone would consider wer they looking for a workstation-class portable, performance is more tha enough for most of what we do.



And one of the benefits of the low voltage processor and the switches fo the optical drive and WiFi radio is increased battery life. This Panasonic goe on and on. I watched a 2.5 hour DVD movie and when it ended, the powe meter still showed 41 percent, which allowed me to work another two hour (mostly light word processing tasks) before the battery low warnin message popped up.

The least attractive aspect of this machine is price. It sells for aroun $2,600 at my local retailer. Compare this with the base model ThinkPad X6 which costs $800 less but gives you the same size screen, a dual cor processor, twice the RAM and a bigger hard drive – but no optical drive. you need a ruggedized, ultralight with exceptional battery life, th Toughbook CF-W5 is a worthy candidate. If you don't, there are alternatives

By David Tanak

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Vista-ready Tablets

Toshiba's Portégé R400 and HP's tx1000 Pavilion Entertainment PC take the Tablet PC in two different directions

Every time a new Windows operating system is launched the nerd in me fondly recalls Weird Al Yankovic's classic geek anthem "Windows 95 Sucks," which humourously—and surprisingly accurately—details the expensive upgrades needed to make the fledgling Windows OS work on an aging 386. After examining all of the hardware he needs to buy—including RAM, hard drive, and a processor—Yankovic belts out in his best Mick Jagger impersonation (the song riffs on Start Me Up), "I need to by myself a brand new machine!"

As it turns out, many people considering a Windows Vista upgrade have come to the exact same conclusion. Luckily, there are plenty of Vista-ready PCs flooding the shelves of your local retail shops. I managed to get my hands on a couple such machines: Toshiba's Portégé R400 and HP's tx1000 Pavilion Entertainment PC. Both are notebook/tablet hybrids and both have been engineered to take advantage of exclusive Vista features.

Toshiba Portégé R400

Toshiba's Portégé is striking evidence that a Windows laptop can be just as sexy as anything Apple makes. Molded in glossy white plastic and mostly free of the many ugly, obtrusive ports and switches that often clutter modern laptops, the R400 is just about the prettiest workstation a person could ask for. Bring one of these babies into a meeting and your colleagues will flock around it the way the businessmen in American Psycho gather together to examine each others' business cards.

Just don't let them play with it too much. Once they get past the gorgeous, clear screen that spins around and snaps tight to create a tablet barely an inch thick, and when their awe of the Toshiba Edge Display—a small LED on the front edge that allows users to monitor emails, calendar alerts, and wireless signal strength when the machine is shut and in sleep mode—subsides, they might notice a few little blemishes. Like the fact that the R400 hasn't an optical drive. And that its hard drive is a measly 80GB. And that the processor is a simple 1.2GHz Intel Core Duo—good for battery life, not a top choice for performance.

Still, the R400 is fully capable of handling the vast majority of tasks demanded by the average business user. It multitasks very well, easily switching between standard office productivity applications like Microsoft Excel, Word and PowerPoint, and the copy of Windows Vista Business Edition provides that extra bit of security many business users are looking for. It's just not a top choice for running multimedia applications.

What it comes down to is this: if you're the type of bloke willing to pony up $2,999 for a machine that's aesthetically arresting but not exactly the most powerful system around, then the Portégé R400 is a perfect candidate on which to blow your portable PC budget.

HP tx1000 Pavilion Entertainment PC

HP's tx1000 is nearly a polar opposite to Toshiba's R400 in that, A) as its name indicates, it's designed to make the most of multimedia and entertainment applications, and B) it has beefier specs and a far more reasonable $1,799 price tag. In other words, you get function over form.

That said, the tx1000 isn't exactly homely. Its shell is composed of shiny black and silver plastic, and the keyboard and display are flanked by buttons that radiate orange and blue light. It's heavier and thicker than the R400 and the screen is a bit dim for outdoor use—

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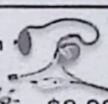
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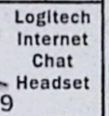
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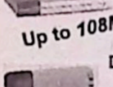
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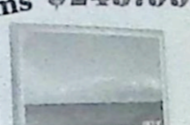
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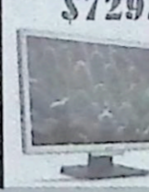
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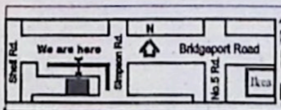

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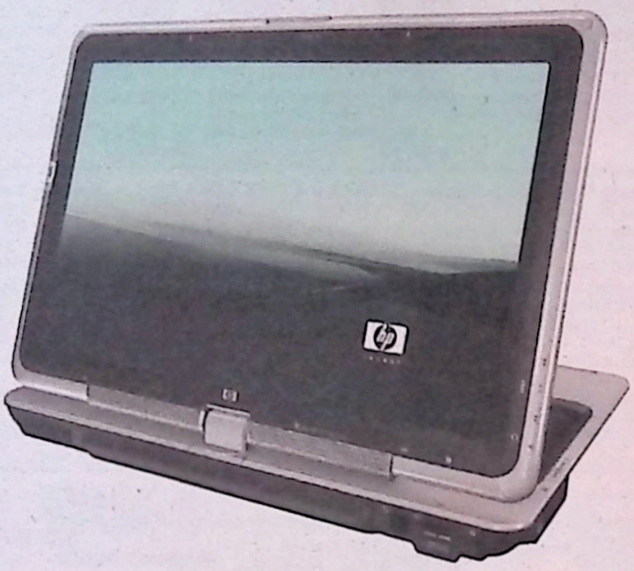
which puts a bit of a damper on tablet functionality—but it comes close to making up for it with a true touch screen (as opposed to the active digitizer technology found in most tablet displays that requires a special stylus). The true touch display let me use a regular pen, a coin edge, or any other pointy object to draw, write and navigate. I even found myself interacting with the screen while in notebook mode, using my fingertip to make menu selections.

But my time spent in tablet mode was relatively brief, as I elected instead to focus on the tx1000's entertainment capabilities. I tried running multiple multimedia apps simultaneously, including Windows Media Center, Windows Media Player, and HP's own QuickPlay movie player, without experiencing a single hiccup in playback. I attributed the strong performance to the tx1000's AMD Turion 64 dual core 2GHz processor, 2GB of RAM, and a GeForce 6150 GO graphics card—a board which, while not suitable for playing 3D games, turned out to be just fine for most other entertainment activities, including digital content creation.

In case you're wondering, the tx1000 also makes for a perfectly adequate workstation, though the fun stuff is so tempting and easy to access that some users might find it hard to tear themselves away from their movies and music to bang out a document. The tx1000 is more of a family tablet—a machine meant to be used within the home, on trips, and by students—and in that capacity it's a strong contender.

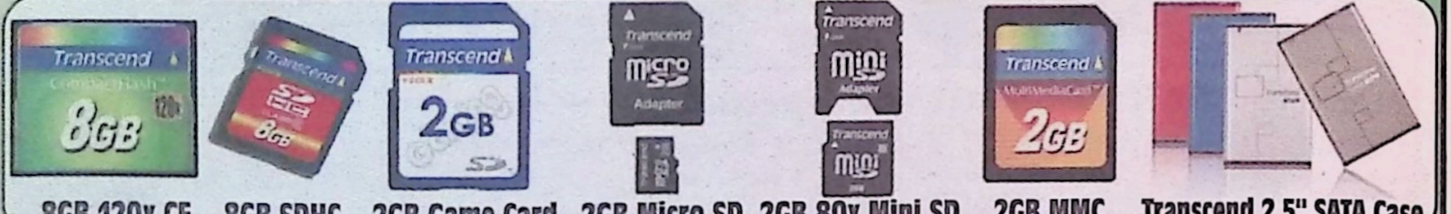
By Chad Sapieha



In April, Microsoft released more Vista gadgets – small, specialized applications that sit in a sidebar on your desktop. To browse through the list of gadgets available and download the ones you want (free of charge), visit the Windows Vista Gadget Gallery at http://gallery.live.com.

Gamers #1 Memory Choice

Transcend



8GB 120x CF | 8GB SDHC | 2GB Game Card | 2GB Micro SD | 2GB 80x Mini SD | 2GB MMC | Transcend 2.5" SATA Case

Transcend

The Memory Specialist

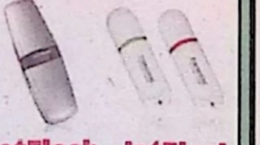
Transcend T.sonic 630 MP3

Transcend T.sonic 820 MP3

Transcend T.sonic 640 MP3

USB FLASH DRIVER

High Speed Ready Boost



JetFlash 2A 16G | JetFlash 130

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TEL: (604) 214-9316
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Hub 2.0

The Web is driven by communities and without them it's basically a gigantic strip-mall with infinite parking. Considering this, we've designed the new hubcanada.com with tools and functionality to provide you with the best online experience and allow you to share and interact with our community and our editors.

Welcome to our community and the Hub Canada team! While we can't supply you with free donuts or coffee (we're working on eDanish), we definitely do want you to help us make hubcanada.com the best digital living online community anywhere! Let's take a walk through the site and go over the fantastic features we are certain will help you help us continue to be the best at what we do and ensure you always find the information you need here at hubcanada.com.

Forums

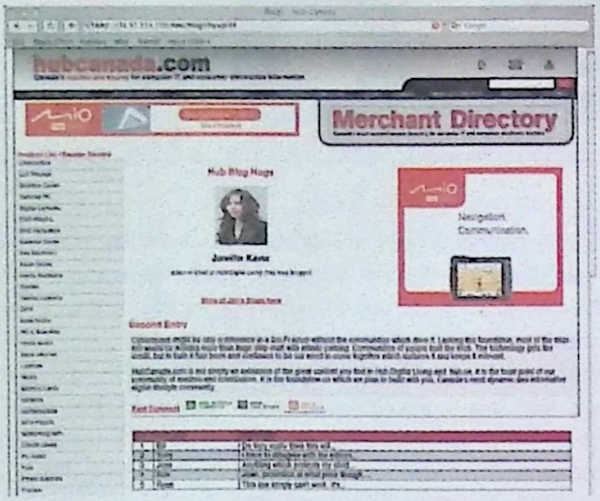
The hubcanada.com forums are to communication what a Swiss army knife is to camping. They're the cornerstone of our community, where you can express opinions on features or issues and engage other Hub community members in lively discussions on any number of digital living related topics.

On the forums, you can directly interact with our editors and columnists regarding past, current and future features. We want your input on any number of issues and carefully consider your suggestions for the site and our magazines.

Having forums means a feature is no longer a linear process where we write it, edit it and then toss it up and walk down to the pub to celebrate our creative genius. Now, a good feature is only the beginning – it will generate discussion in our forums and will often inspire a writer or editor for their next subject. A really thought provoking piece could generate discussion for some time and might (at the discretion of the community) literally become a "never ending story."

Another really beautiful thing about the Hub Canada forums is how they allow people to help each other with digital lifestyle issues and interests. If you are new to our forums, you'll be amazed at how quickly you can get excellent answers to questions on any number of technology issues. From digital photography tips to understanding why Vista is doing the voodoo that it does, the hubcanada.com forums will certainly become one of your most important online resources.

Blogs page



Hubcanada.com 2.0

Merchant Directory

You have to love how on the Web you can find just about any product – if you know where to look. This can get rather challenging if your search has certain geographical limitations. Sure, geography isn't as important nowadays with the coming of the Internet, but maybe you need to find it locally because of time constraints, customs issues or you just plain prefer to do business in your own neck of the woods. Ploughing through a mountain of Web search results and separating the wheat from the chaff can still be time consuming.

If you happen to be looking for a Canadian retailer or service related to digital living, the place to find it is the hubcanada.com merchant directory. Fast, comprehensive and relevant describe it best. Of course, you don't have to rush through it because it's just as much fun to take a slow browse for that gadget you didn't know you had to have.

Blogs

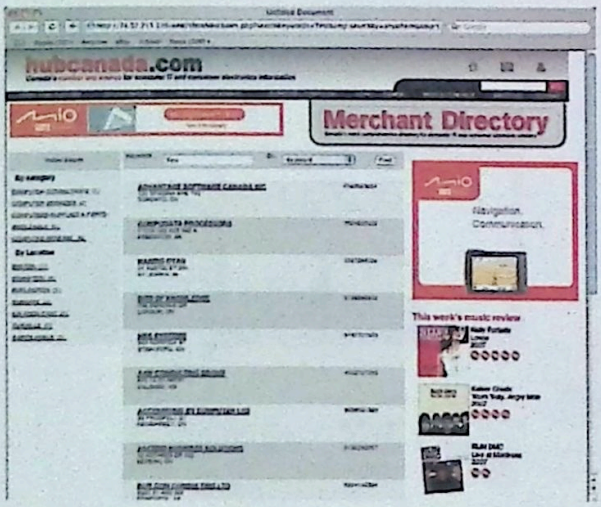
There's an old saying about how everyone has one – an opinion, that is. The challenge has always been the ability to influence other's opinions with yours. With the coming of the Web, this is now much easier for the average person to accomplish. Blogs allow just about everyone who wants a voice to have one and pretty much make it impossible for anyone to have the "last word."

Blogs here at hubcanada.com allow our editors to share opinions, discussions, news and technology developments with our community. More importantly, you are able to respond and share your opinions with the editors and our community. Generating open and public discussion is the primary objective here. Along with user reviews, comments, email and forums, blogs give you direct access to our editors and allow you to become a virtual member of our editorial department.

"I think it's a good thing that there are bloggers out there watching very closely and holding people accountable. Everyone in the news should be able to hold up to that kind of scrutiny. I'm for as much transparency in the newsgathering process as possible."

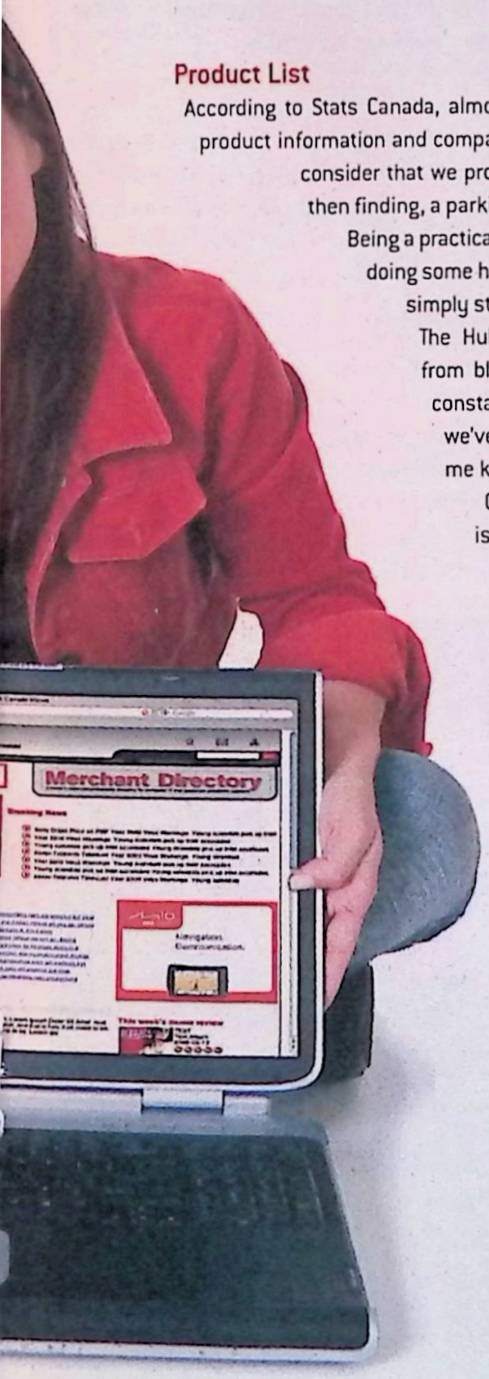
Anderson Cooper - CNN

Merchant Directory page



Interactive, Informative, Immediate

You certainly won't always agree with what we have to say, but you will always be able to offer our editors and community your perspective on the issues at hand; that's a huge leap above what most Canadians have been used to up until now, in regards to the media in general.



Product List

According to Stats Canada, almost half of Canadians browse the Web for product information and comparison shopping. It makes sense when you consider that we probably spend far more time driving to, and then finding, a parking spot at the mall than actually shopping. Being a practical lot, we Canucks naturally see the sense in doing some homework and then walking into a store and simply stating what we want.

The Hub Canada product list covers everything from blank optical disks to video cards, and it's constantly being updated. If you notice a product we've missed, then just drop me a line and let me know.

Certainly, the highlight of our product list is the user reviews. Community members can review items from our products list and share their good and bad experiences, along with their suggestions about how to use or even improve a product. Make no mistake, vendors and manufacturers read these comments and that means your suggestions carry weight.

Reviews

We've got more reviews than Las Vegas – I'm here all week folks...try the fish! Get the lowdown on the latest and greatest from the world's leading experts on digital living products, games, music and movies.

Remember, you are part of our team! You can add your comments, observations or suggestions to reviews and columns. When it comes to technology, we may be the kids in the candy store, but you are playing the role of Willy Wonka.

Trust me when I say that the day I get so jaded that I don't appreciate someone

Stats

In 2005, about 62% of home Internet users - or 38% of Canadian adults overall - went online to view news or sports information.

While on the flip side, heavy Internet users did more than just stare at a PC:

82.9% listen to music on CDs, cassettes, DVDs, records (at least once a week)

72.6% watch a video (at least once a month)

75.7% read a magazine as a leisure activity (at least once a month)

63.3% read a newspaper as a leisure activity (at least 3 times a week)

48.2% read a book as a leisure activity (at least 1 book a month)

18.9% use library services as a leisure activity (at least once every month)

- Source: Stats Canada (2005)

taking time from their busy day to read something we've written and offer feedback will be the day I retire and take up lawn bowling.

Newsletter

Our objective with the hubcanada.com newsletter is to keep people up to date on what's going on at the site and in our publications. Think of it as digital lifestyle "takeout" for the brain. Signing up is easy, and you can rest assured we will treat your email and personal information as if it were our own.

Contests

You've come to expect great contests and prizes from Hub Canada and now we'll kick that up a notch! Watch for lots of fun contests with great prizes at hubcanada.com.

Breaking News

Each day, we'll keep you up to speed on the latest digital living news from every corner of the globe. We know your time is tight, so we'll present the information you need quickly and concisely.

Multimedia Podcasts

Hubcanada.com Podcasts feature Canada's leading digital living gurus, such as Labrats TV and Get Connected TV, and we are expanding the line up constantly. Now you can feed your digital need all at one place. If you have a favourite digital living podcast you'd like to see us carry, then we'd love to hear from you.

Lab Rats TV

Lab Rats is a weekly technology show that demystifies technology for technology enthusiasts with unique humor and a bit of wackiness. Show hosts Andy Walker and Sean Carruthers present informative how-tos, technology 101 segments, and on-the-spot coverage of hot technology conferences.

Get Connected TV

Get Connected is the ultimate guide to getting your business connected with technology. Each week, host Mike Agerbo and co-hosts AJ Vickery and Yolande Lougheed look at what's hot and why.

Neo-Fight TV

Neo-Fight.tv is the weekly technology show for the "not-so-geeky." Hosts Ben Freedman and Tiffany Young rarely agree on whether a new computer or gadget is actually worth the money or just geek-fodder. The end result is an honest and fun look at some of the hottest new gadgets on the market, as well as a few duds.

commandN TV

commandN is a top-rated weekly web news video production that covers technology trends online and offline, as well as providing tech tips, product reviews and more. commandN is hosted by TV personality Amber MacArthur, along with Will Pate, Jeff MacArthur and Brian McKechnie.

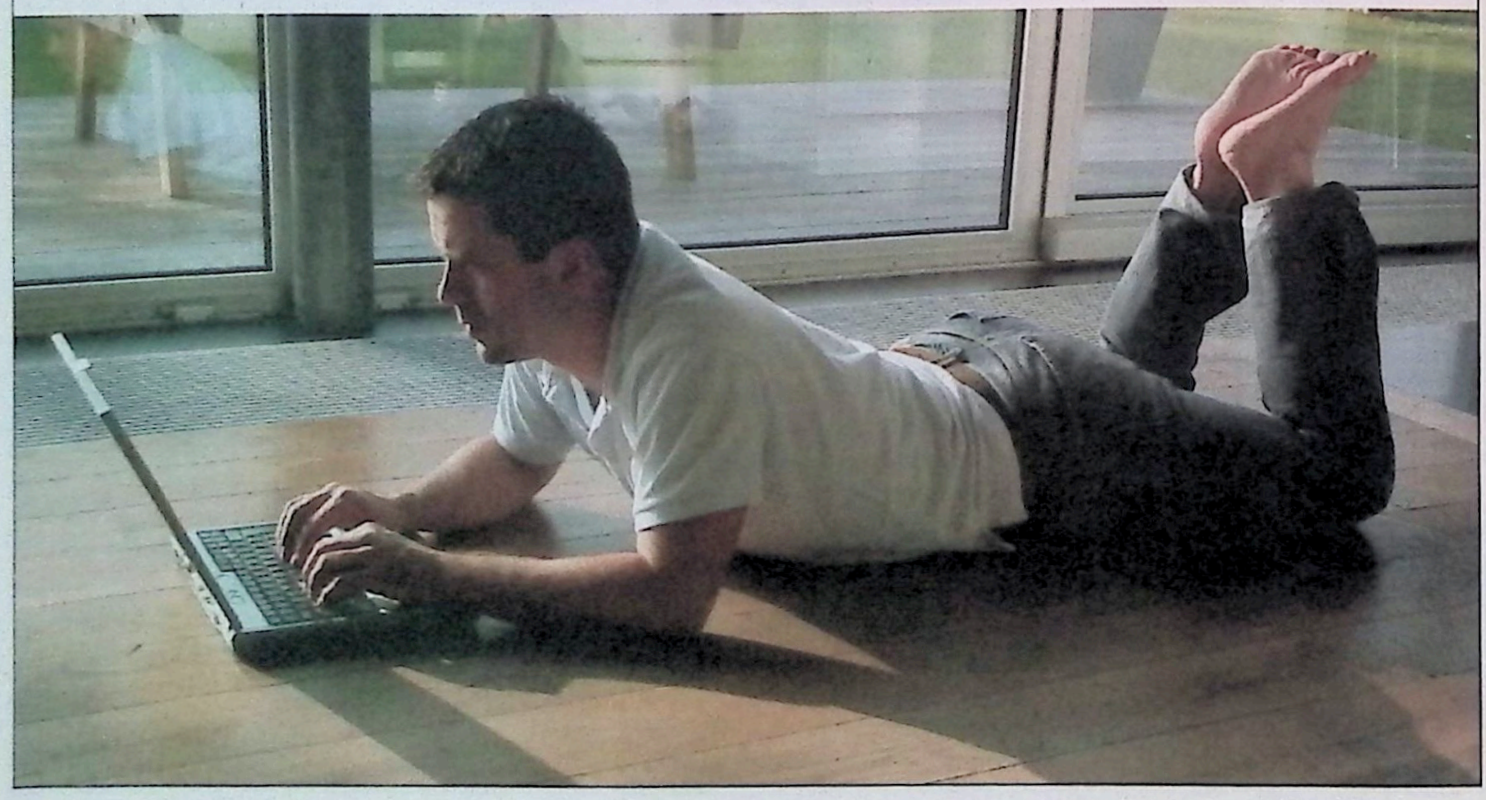
muzikDEN

Hosted by Jeff MacArthur, muzikDEN is about enabling the music community. Teaching and learning. Creating and sharing. muzikDEN is a half hour bi-monthly video podcast from the creators of commandN - one of the web's most popular technology-oriented video podcasts – and is broken into segments covering the entire gamut of musical interests.

Wrapping it up

As editor, I'm not so much excited about what we will do with hubcanada.com 2.0, but what you will do with it! The foundation has been set and now, together, we'll build a dynamic and vibrant community based on the foundation of a common interest regarding all things related to digital living. After all, it's not about what technology can do. It's about what we can do with it.

By Jim Ducharme



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3967 Main Street. Van, BC V5V 3P3 TEL:604-872-4215
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Backup Device

2.5" Enclosure USB 2.0 + 80GB 5400rpm HDD------$79.99
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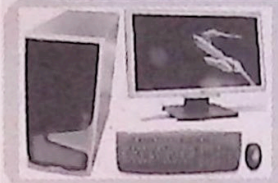
Kingston 1GB Data Traverler USB2.0 (5y MF W)--$15.99
Kingston 2GB Data Traverler USB2.0 (5y MF W)--$28.99

Best Buy #1 : Intel Core 2 Duo (6300)--$799



ACER AL1916WAb 19" LCD, 1440 x 900 / 700:1 / 5ms
Intel Core 2 Duo (E6300) 1.86Ghz 1066FSB Processor
Asus P5L-MX / S-ATA / USB2.0 / LAN / Audio
2 GB DDR-II PC5300 RAM / 18x DVD-RW w/softwar
S-ATA-II 320G (16M) HDD / Oen PCI-Ex Open Slot
5020 ATX Tower + 400W Power Supply
Logitech DX-250 Desktop Keyboard + Optical Mouse

Best Buy#2 : AMD AM2 Dual Core 3800+---$689

ACER AL1916WAb 19" LCD, 1440 x 900 / 700:1 / 5ms
AMD AM2 Dual Core 3800+ 2000FSB Processor
ASUS M2A-VM / S-ATA / Audio / LAN Motherbaord
2 GB DDR-II PC5300 RAM / 18x DVD-RW w/softwar
S-ATA-II 320G (16M) HDD / Oen PCI-Ex Open Slot
5020 ATX Tower + 400W Power Supply
Logitech DX-250 Desktop Keyboard + Optical Mouse

Quad-Core QX6700 + CrossFire---$2399

Intel Quad-Core QX6700 2.66G
1066FSB 8M L2 Cache
ASUS P5W DH DELUXE S-ATA-II MB
ATI 1950Pro-Crossfire 256M DDR3
ATI 1950Pro 256M DDR3 PCI-Exp
2GB DDR-II 800 Mhz RAM
S-ATA-II 500GB 7200rpm (16M) HDD
LG 18x DVD-RW with Burning software
Z01 Gamer Case with Front USB & Audio
ATX680W 12CM LED FAN & 8CM

Core2Duo E6600 + CrossFire---$1559

Quad-Core QX6700 + Nvidia SLI---$2399

Intel Quad-Core QX6700 2.66G
1066FSB 8M L2 Cache
ASUS P5N-E-SLI S-ATA-II / PCI-Express
ASUS 8600GTS 256M DDR3 PCI-E
ASUS 8600GTS 256M DDR3 PCI-E
2GB DDR-II 800 Mhz RAM
S-ATA-II 500GB 7200rpm (16M) HDD
LG 18x DVD-RW with Burning software
Z01 Gamer Case with Front USB & Audio
ATX 680W 12CM LED FAN & 8CM

Core2Duo E6600 + Nvidia SLI---$1559

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Acer AS5610-4621 Core Duo 1.66G,1G RAM, 160G, DVDRW, Wireless,USB,56K, 15.4" Vista Home Premium----------$849
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10. Acer 2216WD 22" 1680X1050 / 700:1 / 5MS/ DVI-------$285.99
11. D-Link DL-DCS2100 Internet Camera with7 Built in Mic--$179.99
12. ASUS WL-330G Wireless Access Point 802.11G---------$47.99
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16. WD S-ATA-II 400G 7200rpm with 16MB Buffer HDD---$122.99

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Vista Home Basic / Premium (32bit)---$100 / $133
Vista Business / Ultimate (32bit)-------$150 / $225
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03 Server SBE w/ 5user/ +5user---$495 / $465

Office 2007 Basic / SBE / PRO---$189 / $268/ $355
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Corel Word Perfect V.13 CD----------$38
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Norton 07 Anti-Virus / Internet Security----$20 / $30
Mcafee 07 Anti-Virus / Internet Security---$10 / $20

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AM2 Sampron 3000+--$249
AM2 Sampron 3500+--$279
Dual Core(AM2) 3600+--$309

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350W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Keyboard + Wheel Mouse
Multimedia Speakers

AM2 Power

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Dual Core(AM2) 3600+--$379
Dual Core(AM2) 3800+--$389

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400W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mousee
Multimedia Speakers

AM2 PRO

Dual Core(AM2) 3800+--$449
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Dual Core(AM2) 4600+--$499

FOXCONN-6100M2MA-RS2H
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S-ATA-II 250GB (8M) 7200rpm HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
EN6200TC64/256 (upto 256M) PCI-E
USB2.0 / Integrated 10/100 LAN & Audio
400W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mousee
Multimedia Speakers

AM2 Gamer

Dual Core (AM2) 3800+-$679
Dual Core (AM2) 4600+-$729
Dual Core (AM2) 5200+-$789

ASUS M2N S-ATA-II / PCI-Ex
2 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA-II 320GB (16M) 7200rpm HDD
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Nvidia EN7600GT 256MB DDR3 PCI-Exp
USB2.0 / Integrated Gigabit LAN & Audio
420W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mouse
Edifier M1300 2.1 Speakers

AM2 Slilent

Dual Core (AM2) 4600+-$929
Dual Core (AM2) 5200+-$989
Dual Core (AM2) 6000+-$1089

ASUS M2N4-SLI S-ATA-II / PCI-E
2 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA-II 400GB 7200rpm (16M) HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
Asus EN7600GS (Silent) 512MB PCI-Exp
USB2.0 / Integrated Gigabit LAN & Audio
Antec Sonata-II 450W Tower Case
Logitech LX710 Wireless Combo
Edifier M3300 2.1 Speakers

Intel Value

Celeron (331) 2.66G---$269
Dual Core 915 2.80G---$349
Core 2 Duo (E6300)----$449

ECS P4M900T-M2 DDR-II PCI-Ex
512 MB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
80GB (8M) 7200rpm HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
ONE PCI-Express Open Slot
USB2.0 / Integrated 10/100 LAN & Audio
350W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Keyboard + Wheel Mouse
Multimedia Speakers

Intel Power

Celeron (331) 2.66G---$349
Dual Core 915 2.80G---$429
Core 2 Duo (E6300)----$529

Asus P5VD2-MX SE DDR-II PCI-Ex
1 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA-II 160GB (8M) 7200rpm HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
ONE PCI-Express Open Slot
USB2.0 / Integrated 10/100 LAN & Audio
400W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mousee
Multimedia Speakers

Intel PRO

Dual Core 915 2.8G-----$499
Core 2 Duo (E6300)----$599
Core 2 Duo (E6400)----$629

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1 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA-II 250GB (8M) 7200rpm HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
EN6200TC64/256 (upto 256M) PCI-E
USB2.0 / Integrated 10/100 LAN & Audio
400W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mousee
Multimedia Speakers

Intel Gamer

Core 2 Duo (E6300)----$799
Core 2 Duo (E6400)----$829
Core 2 Duo (E6600)----$869

ECS P965T-A S-ATA-II PCI-Ex
2 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA 320GB (16M) 7200rpm HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
Nvidia EN7600GT 256MB DDR3 PCI-Exp
USB2.0 / Integrated Gigabit LAN & Audio
420W Tower Case w/ 2x USB
Logitech Keyboard + Optical Mouse
Edifier M1300 2.1 Speakers

Intel Slilent

Core 2 Duo (E6300)----$979
Core 2 Duo (E6400)----$1009
Core 2 Duo (E6600)----$1049

ASUS P5PL2 S-ATA-II PCI-Ex
2 GB DDR-II (PC5300) RAM
S-ATA-II 400GB 7200rpm (16M) HDD
LG DVD-RW 18X +/- Dual Layer
Asus AX1600PRO (Silent) 512M PCI-Exp
USB2.0 / Integrated Gigabit LAN & Audio
Antec Sonata-II 450W Tower Case
Logitech LX710 Wireless Combo
Edifier M3300 2.1 Speakers

All system have a 3 year labor & 1 year parts limited warranty.

Price & availability are subject to change without notice. All tradmarks & brands are properties of their owners.
All advertised prices reflect 3% cash or Interac discount. We reserve the right to correct typographical errors.

Access all your PC's media on your TV

Apple TV

Chances are your PC has become a hub for all your media, be it downloaded music, edited photos and camcorder footage, and maybe even recorded TV shows and movies.

Perhaps this isn't much of a surprise, considering an inexpensive hard drive can store many thousands of songs, photos and videos, not to mention a high-speed Internet connection is a fast and convenient way to obtain new digital content.

But let's face it – why watch movies on your small computer monitor when you have a huge television in the next room? Why resort to your PC's tiny speakers for music when you own a multichannel stereo system? And who wants to bring the family in a messy home office to view photos of the kids on the computer when you can do so more comfortably on a big couch and big TV? You get the idea.

And so today, we have a handful of products that let you wirelessly stream your PC-based media to your family room so you can enjoy music, photos and videos through your home theatre.

All that's required is a wireless router - something you can pick up for as little as $25 these days - and one of the following products:

Apple TV

As with other wireless media receivers that you connect to your television, Apple TV ($349, www.apple.ca) is the newest kid on the block that lets couch potatoes access their PC-based media through the popular (and free) iTunes software.

Windows or Mac users can now use the tiny white remote (included) to scroll through music, podcasts, audiobooks, photos, music videos and animated shorts on their television. Too bad Canadians still cannot download movies and TV shows via iTunes (as our American neighbours can).

The silver Apple TV, which is about the size of a hardcover book, is easy to set up: simply connect the unit to the television via a high-definition multimedia interface (HDMI) cable, which handles both video and audio, or component cables (the red, blue and green video-only cord). (Note: because there is no support for composite (RCA) cables, or S-Video, Apple TV will not work on older televisions. Analog and optical audio outputs are both offered, however.) Next, have Apple TV join your wireless network (with speeds up to 802.11n, the latest and fastest WiFi standard) or connect directly to your router or modem through a wired connection thanks to the Ethernet jack at the back of the unit.

Apple TV offers a built-in 40-gigabyte hard drive to store up to 50 hours of video, 9,000 songs or 25,000 photos (or, realistically, a combination of all three). Storing the media on the drive will produce smoother video quality (with less "stutters") than streaming it in real time from the PC.

Keep in mind, however, at the time of writing this, iTunes is still not fully compatible with the Windows Vista operating system.

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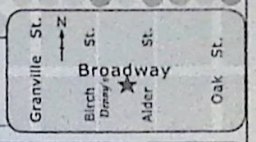

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PcChips P13G+ (All in one)	Asus P5PE-VM Motherboard	Asus P5GL-MX Motherboard	Asus P5B i965 Motherboard
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R08 17" ATX Tower Case	Intel Extreme 3D Graphics	Intel 950 Extreme Graphics	Geforce 7300GS 256MB PCI-X
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AMD Sempron 3000	Athlon64x2 3600+	Athlon64x2 4200+	Athlon64x2 5200+
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52x32x52 CD-RW	18x D-Layer DVD-/+RW	18x D-Layer DVD-/+RW (HDTV Output)	18x D-Layer DVD-/+R
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D-Link MediaLounge
DSM-320 Wireless Media Player

D-Link MediaLounge

Similarly, the D-Link (www.dlink.ca) MediaLounge Wireless Media Player (DSM-320; $199.99) distributes audio and video content from a PC to a TV over a wireless network.

Consider it a set-top box that connects to a TV that enables you to wirelessly access music, pictures and videos stored on a computer hard drive. It can also be used to stream select Internet radio stations and services to the home theatre via 802.11g/b technology (up to 54 Mbps).

While the on-screen interface isn't as sleek or as user-friendly as Apple TV, it supports many more audio, video and photo formats than iTunes, which is good for those with lots of camcorder footage, downloaded movies or TV programs, or WMA (Windows Media Audio) music, the latter of which is unsupported by Apple's software. In fact, the DSM-320 supports nearly 20 such "codecs," including the popular DivX and XviD video files. But unlike the Apple TV, the MediaLounge does not have a built-in hard drive.

At the back of this slim, silver digital media adapter are a handful of audio and video output options: composite (RCA), component, S-Video and optical audio - but no HDMI support for the highest quality audio/video in one cable.

Similar to Apple TV, if your high-speed modem is in the same room as your TV, or if you don't own a wireless router, you may choose to connect this product with the optional wired LAN jack. Travelling to Europe for the summer? No problem: A switch allows you to toggle between PAL and NTSC settings.

HP MediaSmart TVs

If you're in the market for a new high-definition television and want to be able to access all of your PC-based media on it, you can kill two birds with one stone by picking up the new MediaSmart TV (from$1,799.99 for a 37-inch model) from HP (www.hp.ca).

Built into these HDTVs are wireless receivers capable of streaming music, photos and videos from a nearby PC (wireless or wired options), and with a very clean and attractive interface to navigate through all the content.

The top-of-the-line solution is the HP MediaSmart SL4278 ($2,699), a 47-inch television with 802.11n wireless networking, full 1080p support (1920 by 1080 pixels) and the ability to connect to online services for access to thousands of movies and millions of songs.

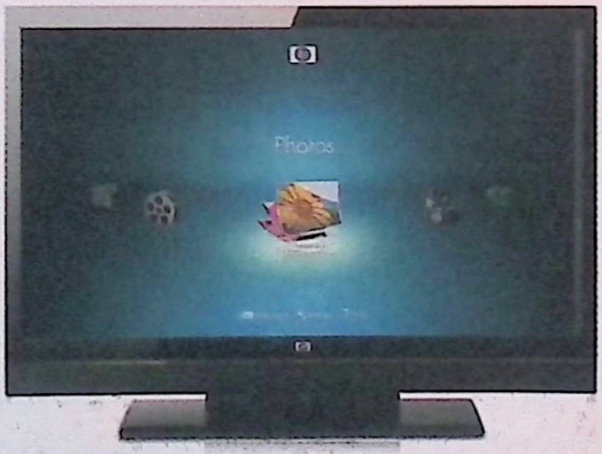
This HP MediaSmart TV also includes three HDMI slots to connect additional components and includes an ATSC tuner for free over-the-air HD broadcasts.

Other solutions

Xbox 360 (www.xbox.ca) owners can pick up a Wireless Networking Adapter ($129.99), a small unit with an antenna that connects to the video game console, allowing you to wirelessly access media on your computer in another room. Problem is you need an Xbox 360 and a computer with Media Center software installed. Microsoft says this is the first example of a "Windows Media Extender," but we'll probably see this technology built into high-definition televisions, digital media set-top boxes and DVD players sometime this year.

From Zio Canada (www.ziocanada.com) comes the Eureka LX350HD ($349.99), a small HD-capable unit that also wirelessly communicates with your PC over a WiFi connection - and unlike the other solutions, no software is necessary to install on the computer beforehand. The TV interface uses a Windows Explorer-like folder and files interface. You can also insert an internal hard drive (sold separately) to bring movies, music and photos to any TV in the home, cottage or hotel room.

By Marc Saltzman



HP MediaSmart TV

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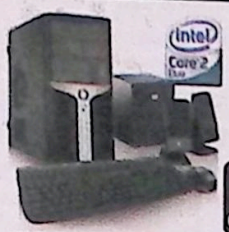

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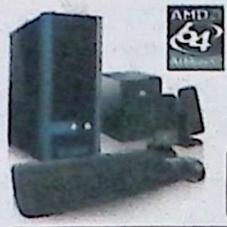

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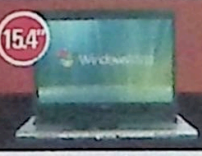

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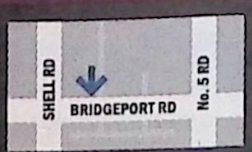

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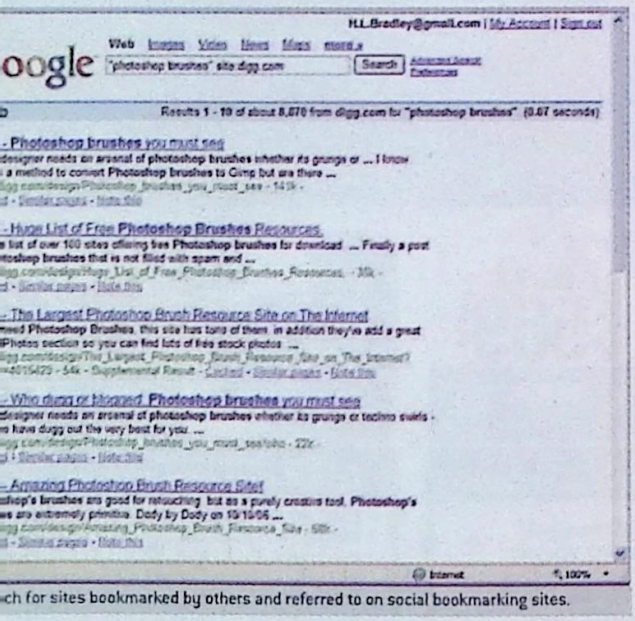

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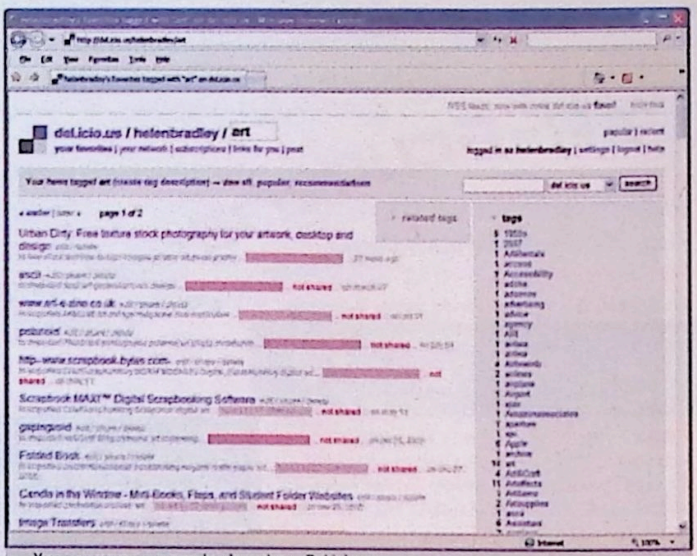

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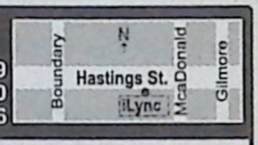

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Hot spots for game geeks

Seven sites found in the favourites folder of HUB videogame reporter Chad Sapieha

www.gamefaqs.com

There are few things more frustrating than putting dozens of hours into a game, only to get completely stumped by a mind-bending brainteaser or your rump repeatedly handed to you by a madly challenging boss. The quickest solution is to head to a game help site like the longstanding GameFAQs. It's a massive community that generates detailed game walkthroughs and tips for most well-known titles. Just be forewarned: the guides, often written by teenagers who should have spent more time doing their English homework and less time playing games, lack the polished prose of professional game aid publications. Expect misspelled words, disconcerting grammar and the writer's train of thought to take the occasional detour.

www.ige.com

So, you want a level 70 gnome warrior in World of Warcraft, but pesky things like your job and family keep getting in the way of you putting in the required hours. Or maybe there's a sword you've had your eye on for a few months in Final Fantasy XI, but you just haven't been able to save enough gil. No problem. Just head over to IGE and plop down $600 for that veteran gnome or $1000 for enough virtual cash to buy that blade. Is it cheating? Sure. How much sense does it make to spend your hard earned real-world dollars on virtual items and currency? Not a lick. Do people really do it? All the time. The virtual assets industry is worth billions and employs thousands of gamers overseas who spend their workdays wandering through fantasy realms, leveling up characters and collecting items to be sold.

www.grrlgamer.com

Let's face it: girl gamers get no respect. They're dissed by the developers, who have a knack for making female characters little more than busty sex pots, and their male counterparts often think little of their skills or dedication. That's where decade-old Grrlgamer comes in. Written by women gamers for women gamers, this site provides reviews and news from a female perspective while offering up the occasional essay on gaming culture and how girls fit into it. The site design is a little flat, but the content is well written and insightful.

www.joystiq.com

Sort of an Engadget for gamers, this lengthy, frequently-updated blog uses a witty, critical voice to report on all of the latest news from the videogame world while at the same time offering informed opinions on gaming rumours, trends and culture. The information is reliable and timely—Joystiq's contributors often scoop top-tier game sites and publications on major industry gossip and announcements.

www.gametap.com

Taking a cue from online music destinations like Napster, GameTap offers a subscription-based game service that delivers access to thousands of familiar titles. Eight bucks a month gives you the right to play until your fingers bleed. GameTap's selection includes arcade classics such as Defender and Frogger, hundreds of hits from past consoles like the Commodore 64 and Sega Dreamcast, and a broad range of Windows PC games, including exclusive new titles like Myst Online: Uru Live.

www.gamelemons.com

Rottentomatoes has become an indispensable reference tool for avid movie goers, reliably steering people clear of foul celluloid. And while RT has dabbled with doing the same for games, they can't match gamelemons, a site wholly dedicated to finding a critical median among widely recognized media outlets for newly released games. The founders wisely recognized that game review scores tend to skew high, so in order to receive a positive overall rating, a game has to average at least 70 percent among selected reviews.

www.hlcomic.com

A lot of gamers might be geeks, but even they tend to look down their noses at the comic crowd. That might not be the case if they checked out Concerned, an epic—and hilarious—web comic composed of screenshots from Half Life 2. The story revolves around a cowardly and clueless fellow named Gordon Frohman who is continually mistaken for Gordon Freeman, the game's heroic freedom fighter. The panels in which Frohman stumbles into an online game and accidentally kills his entire team constitute just one of the highlights of this so-called "gamic."

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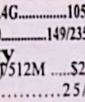
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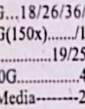
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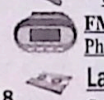
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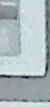

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Gamers get a Second Life

Why this virtual world is beginning to appeal to gamers

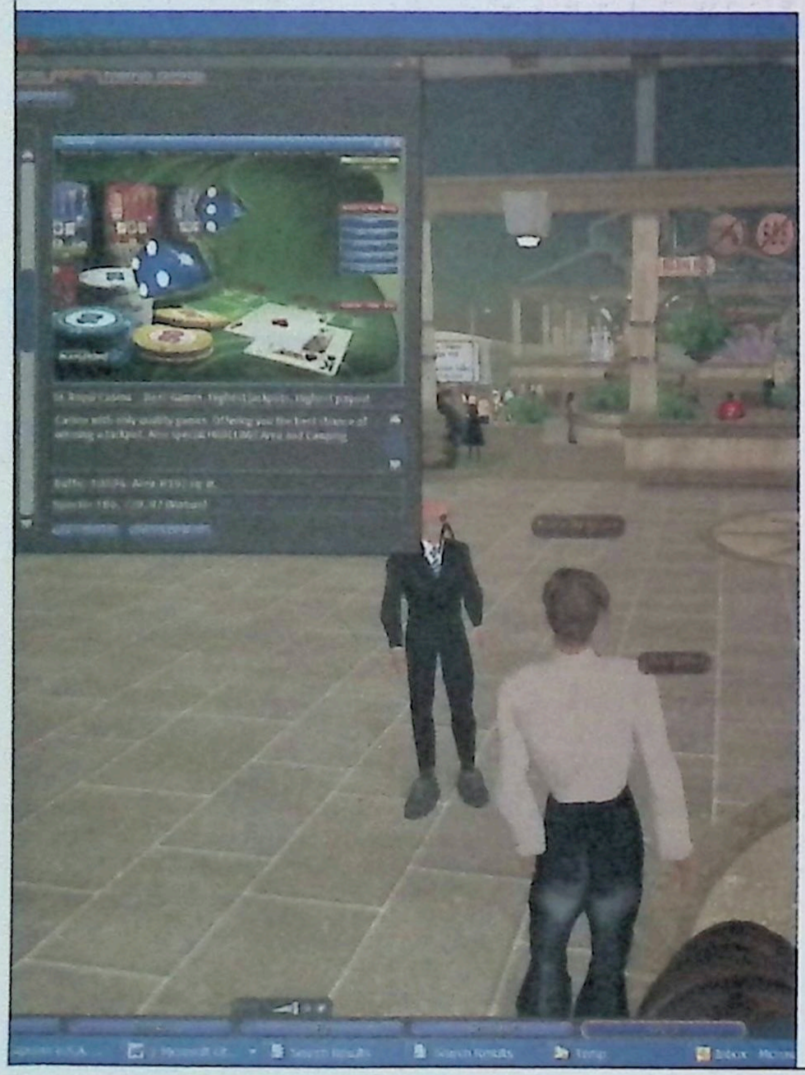
We know, we know, you're a hardcore PC gamer. You look down your nose at friends who think a "mod" is a British teen from the '60s and "WoW" is a Bananarama album from the late '80s. Your bumper sticker says, "My other car is a BF2142 Talon Gunship." Your knuckles spell out O-U-A-D on one hand and C-O-R-E on the other. We get it.

So any time you've read about the Second Life (www.secondlife.com) – a virtual, persistent world with more than three million "residents" worldwide – you've rolled your eyes in disgust at the amount of mainstream press its received.

Yes, Linden Labs' Second Life is not a game. True, you can walk, talk, even fly through multiple continents, build houses, sell items, create Machinima movies - but there can't be anything in this online phenomenon for a gamer like you, right? Wrong.

Second Life does house a handful of computer games you can play in this world, ranging from RPGs and RTSs to collectible card games and puzzle diversions. Not only are most free to play – some may require Linden dollars, the currency in the game – but Second Life also includes free tools for you to create your very own games. Second Life is also free to download and play, unless you want to buy land to build on, which will cost you $9.95 a month.

"I'm a serious gamer, so let me assure others there is something for them in Second Life," confirms Ben Badstone-Cunningham, a developer at Linden Labs who has also created a laser tag-based first-person shooter in this virtual world. "One of the best reasons to create a game in Second Life is you've got a built-in community of players who can play and play-test what you've made and even provide feedback on it on the spot," adds Badstone-Cunningham.



B.Y.O.I. (Idea)

Some games created in Second Life have become so successful, they've been published on other platforms. Tringo (www.meez.com/tringo.dm), for example, is a puzzle game that can be best described as a cross between Tetris and Bingo, which is now available on the Nintendo Game Boy Advance (published by Crave Entertainment).

"Granted, this is a fairly simple casual game," concedes Badstone-Cunningham, "but in Second Life, there are many tournaments, prizes and a [live] host that can help players get started." The best part is, he adds, you own the IP [intellectual property] when you make a game in Second Life - and you can begin to make money off of it right away. "You can then use the money to buy things in Second Life or convert it to real U.S. dollars," he says. At the time of writing this, the exchange rate is roughly one US dollar for every 270 Linden dollars.

What makes Second Life different from World of Warcraft, explains Badstone-Cunningham, is Linden Labs provides the development tools to make content, including a full 3-D modeler and scripting engine that lets users create anything, be it designer clothes, a house, flyable airplane or interactive game. You can have gamers walk up to your piece of land to try your game without leaving their third- or first-person view, or you can have the camera locked once they hop on a stool to try out a casino diversion you whipped up.

"Personally, I find it easier to make games in Second Life than making a Half-Life mod or using the Unreal engine," insists Badstone-Cunningham, who also hosts and moderates an annual game development competition, where the top prize is eight acres of free land in Second Life.

More info on the Second Life development tools is available at http://secondlife.com/whatis/creations.php. Web sites, such as Game SLave Wiki (www.gameslavewiki.com) discuss some of the Second Life-based games to check out.

Got Game?

If you're still reading, then perhaps you're convinced there might be some value here for gamers and game developers. The following are a few examples of the kinds of games we found and played in Second Life...

Combat: Samurai Island

Played individually or in clans, C:SI is a melee fighting game loaded with swift swordplay, magic and aerial attacks. Earn skills and kewl clothing to outfit your warrior while visiting different locations for a change of scenery. Newbies can attend schools and workshops in various dojos to get the hang of the game-play. Created by Esprite Xavier, Ayame Musashi and Archanox Underthorn (bonus points if you can say these names three times fast).

The Collective

Created and maintained by Grim Hathor and Matthias Zander, The Collective is a kind of Magic: The Gathering-like fantasy card game with purchasable bonus packs used to duel against other players. Giant cards float in from each player's avatar, which could range from a seemingly-harmless chicken to a nasty ice dragon, as you take turns unleashing magic, gaining points and even interacting with virtual pets.

DarkLife

Trouble is brewing on the once-peaceful island of Navora. Nasty creatures have disrupted this fishing and trading community, so you've been summoned to help ward off the attack in this popular MMORPG. Battle monsters (in turn-based fashion) for experience points, prestige and gold. Level up to unlock new skills, weapons, equipment and magic spells. Help thy neighbor with healing potions. Created by Mark Busch, Pirate Cotton and others.

Frootcake

Nobody likes fruitcake, but only this game lets you do something about it. The neon sign draws you into the 1950s-style diner as you join other players in this puzzle game. Players must put a coin in the jukebox and pass a cake to the player on the left - or if you're daring, choose to take the cake and all the coins in the jukebox, before passing the cake on. Cakes are bad and coins are good, so you want less of the former and more of the latter. Tournaments and side-bets add some additional appeal. Frootcake was designed by Rifkin Habsburg.

Second Life residents typically find games by typing in a keyword or two into the search engine, before teleporting to the location where the game is hosted.

By Marc Saltzman

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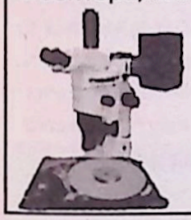

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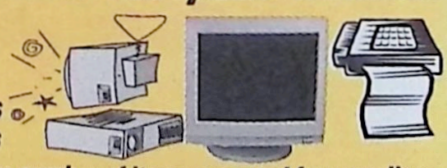

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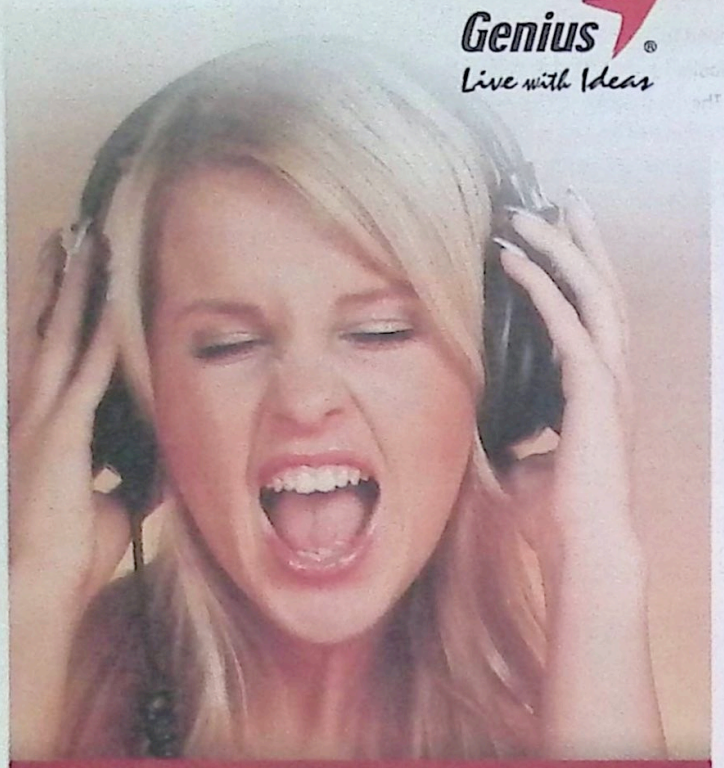

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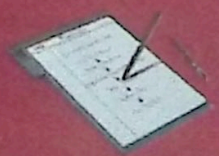

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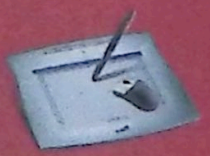

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When bad things happen to good worksheets

A typo or two in a word processing document is unlikely to have grave consequences. The same can't be said for errors in worksheets. Spreadsheets are typically used to calculate figures including budgets and business projections, so the difference between 10 and 100 could be disastrous. Whenever you create a spreadsheet, your first thought should be towards ensuring accuracy.

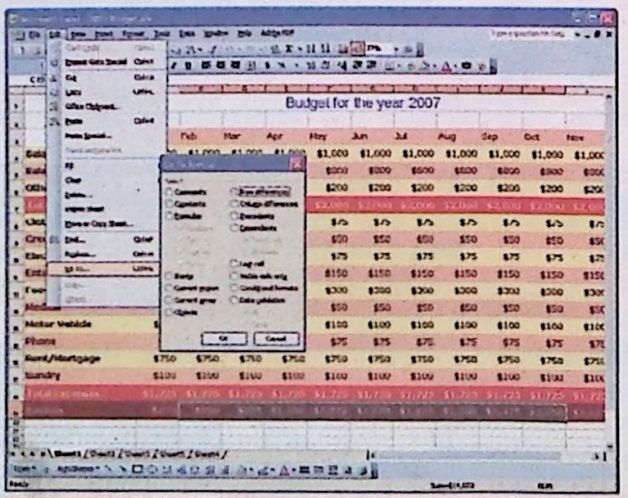
To understand what can go wrong, it will help to understand the different types of errors you may encounter. Syntax errors are errors in how you write an Excel formula. For example, if you use =SUMALL instead of =SUM, Excel will identify this with an #NAME? error or will refuse to enter the formula into the cell. Syntax errors are typically easy to identify, and fixed by typing the function correctly.

Errors in logic occur when a formula computes the correct result, but it is not the answer that you are intending because of an error in the formula's design. For example, if you use a PMT function to make a finance calculation and enter the interest rate as 7.5 instead of 7.5%, Excel will calculate the payments correctly on the data you provide it with – in this case, Excel interprets the 7.5 to mean an interest rate of 750 percent. Of course, the result won't be what you expect. Logic errors like this are often difficult to track down.

Of all the types of errors, perhaps the one most difficult to locate is a runtime error. These errors typically occur sporadically when certain conditions are met. For example, you may have a cell that derives its value from other cells. In one percent of cases, that cell may return a zero value and, if it is used as a divisor in another calculation, the worksheet will fail because division by zero is impossible. If the error occurs only occasionally, it may be difficult to prevent.

Another type of error is user error, which is caused by users who typically do not understand what they are doing. The user might enter incorrect data or type over a formula with a number and prevent the cell from calculating in the future.

Once you know the types of errors that may occur, you can work to prevent them from happening. To stop users from damaging your worksheets, unlock those cells that the user needs to access to type data. To do this, select those cells and choose Format, Cells, Protection tab and disable the Locked checkbox. Then protect the entire worksheet



The Excel GoTo command can help identify problems in formulas that should be consistent across a row or down a column.

by choosing Tools, Protection, Protect Sheet and if desired, enter a password to protect the sheet and click Ok. Now the user will be limited to only those cells in which they are free to enter data and your formulas will be protected.

Many logic errors can be tracked by testing the worksheet with data for which you already know the result. Enter this data into the worksheet and check to see that the worksheet gives the same result as your other calculations. If this data is not available, enter some test numbers into the worksheet and, at the same time, make the calculations manually and check the results.

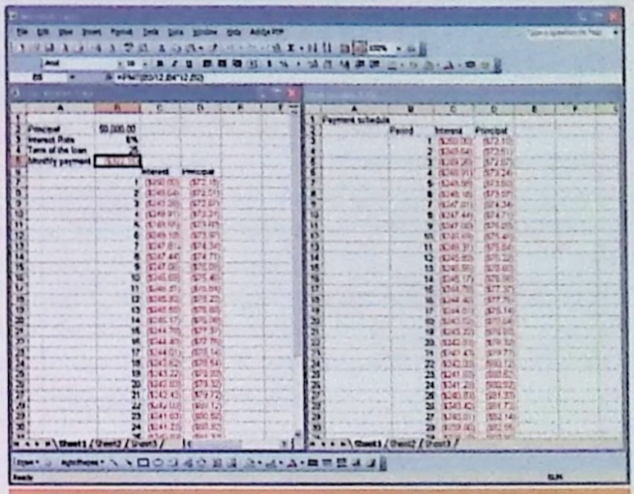
Errors where a formula operates on an incorrect range may occur if you write formulae for a series of totals rather than creating one and copying the formula across the other cells. To locate a potential problem in a series of formulas, first select the cells that should all contain a similar formula and choose Edit, Go To, Special and select either the Row Differences option or Column Differences option to check formulas across the row or down the column. Excel checks all the formulas against the one in the active cell and reports any differences.

To locate problems where a user overtypes a formula with a number, select the area containing the formulas and choose Edit, Go To, Special, Formulas. All cells containing formulas will be highlighted so, any that aren't highlighted may indicate potential problems.

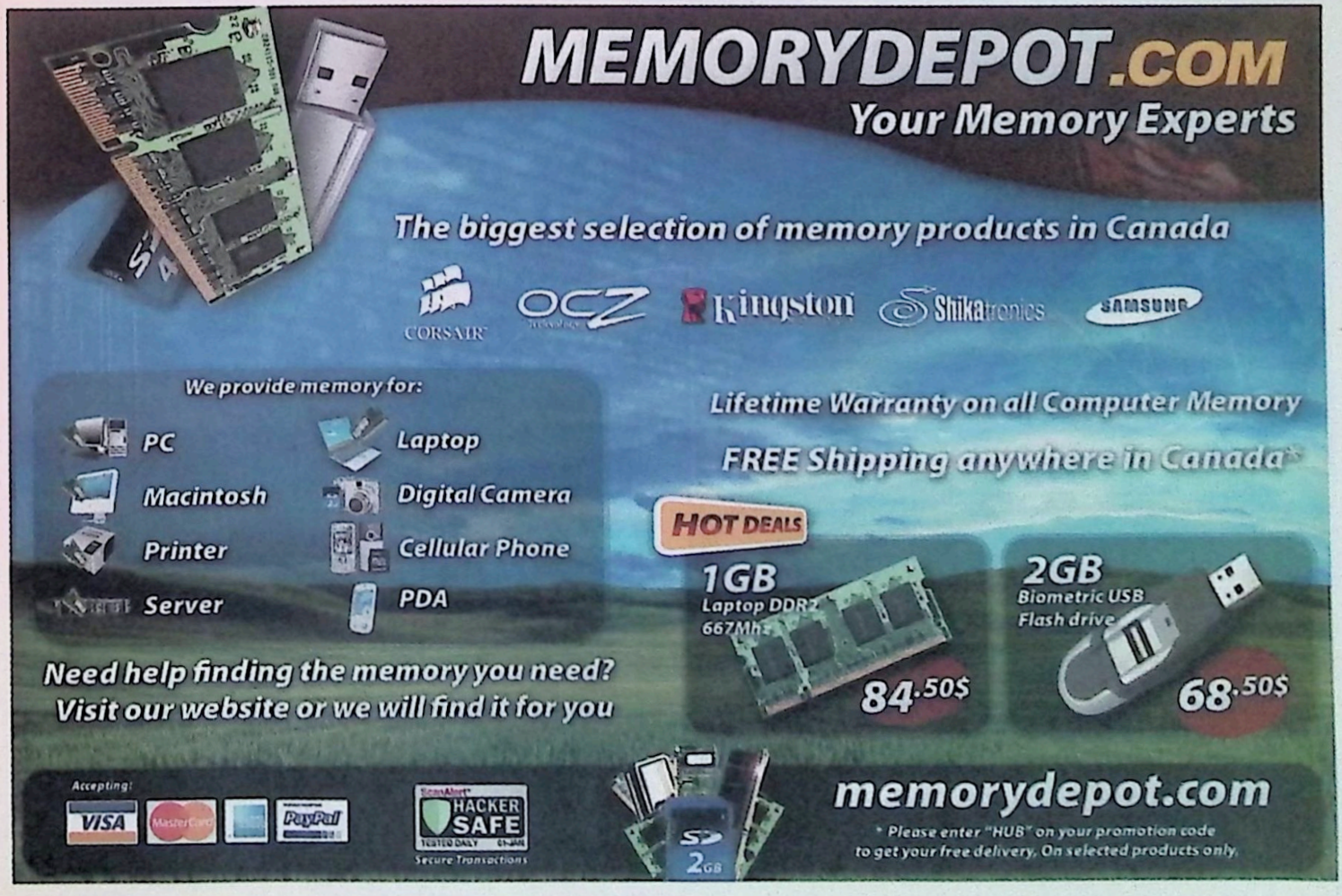
When you are working with constant values such as interest rates, there's a temptation to bury them inside formulas, making it difficult to see where they are used or to check their accuracy. A better way to design a worksheet is to place constant values, such as interest rates, in a special data area on the worksheet. Then refer to that cell in the formula when you need to use it. Not only does this make the value visible, but it also makes it easier to update.

The key tool for ensuring that your Excel worksheets are free from errors is your attitude to your work. If you understand there is a likelihood that your worksheets contain errors, and if you work to prevent them, you're less likely to encounter problems than if you blithely expect that whatever is entered into a worksheet is somehow inherently correct.

By Helen Bradley

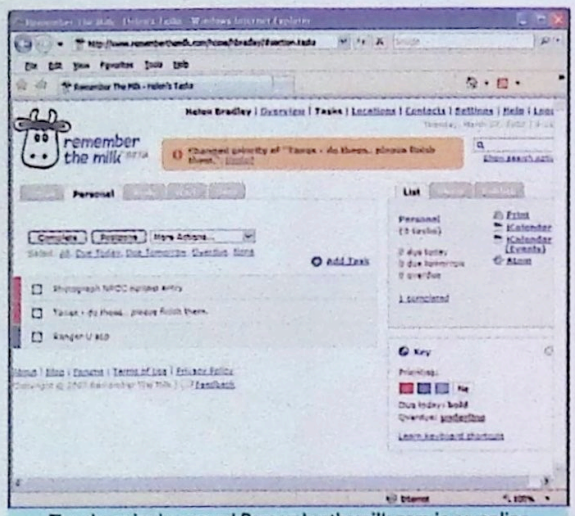


Placing the data that you use in your formulas in a place you can see lets you check the data and easily alter it.



Your Web Office

Online applications are not new and, in fact, they have been around for many years. However, in the last few years, the numbers of online applications have multiplied, and many of this new batch are applications we would consider to be small or home office productivity tools. Some of these online applications mirror the applications you already have on your desktop, such as Outlook's task list and calendar, and others are new applications created to make it easier to work in a digital environment.



The charmingly-named Rememberthemilk.com is an online to do list that helps you organize your day.

The key feature of most online applications is that they are hosted online and to use them, you must be connected to the Internet. You access them via a web browser and your data is stored online or locally, depending on the application.

There are some benefits to this. One is that the applications are updated regularly, so everyone who uses the application automatically uses the updated version. For a business with a small or no IT department, the fact that the solution provider provides the updates and manages the technical issues is a plus. Another benefit is that the application is scalable, so it is easy to add new users by simply signing them up. In terms of IT savings, online applications offer significant benefits, particularly to small businesses.

On the flip side, you'll be forced into using the new updates whether you like it or not. Also, if you save your data online, you rely on the company providing the service to implement the necessary security precautions. Before you take a mission-critical application such as accounting online, it's important that you thoroughly investigate the data security issues.

In online applications, you are also reliant on the company being in business as long as you are. If the company goes belly up, then you could be left without an application and possibly without your data. Another concern is the need to be permanently connected to the Internet to use the applications. You still cannot access the Internet on an airplane and many

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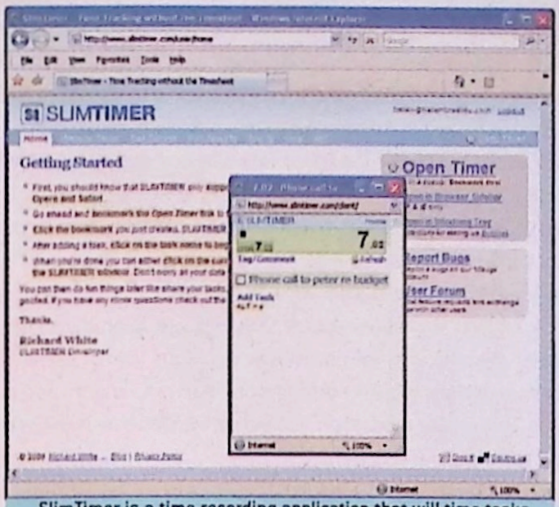
users do not have universal wireless connectivity. On the other hand, offline applications can be used anywhere your computer can be used.

Online calendar applications include Google Calendar (google.com/calendar) and 30Boxes (30boxes.com). For news reading, online RSS readers include Google Reader (google.com/reader) and BlogLines (bloglines.com). If your business involves tracking and billing on a time base, you can use online tools such as Time Tracker (formassembly.com/time-tracker) or SlimTimer (slimtimer.com). For workgroup computing and sharing data and files online, try BlueTie (bluetie.com) or WebEx WebOffice (weboffice.com).



SlimTimer is a time recording application that will time tasks for you and create reports for time billing needs.

For project management, there is Zoho Projects (zoho.com) and applications such as Basecamp (basecamphq.com), which allow you to organize your projects and communicate with other users. If you need to organize your life, there are plenty of To Do list applications, including the charmingly-named Remember the Milk (rememberthemilk.com) and Todoist (todoist.com). For personal organization, the quintessential online application is Backpack (backpackit.com), which offers features for organizing notes, ideas, to do's and your schedule.

Other online applications that have changed the way people do business include Citrix Go To Meeting (gotomeeting.com), which allows you to create and hold online meetings. Using this application, you can hold a meeting with anyone, anywhere in the world, and they can see your computer screen as you talk to them over the phone, thus saving the time and expense of travelling to meetings.

While online applications or software as a service (SaaS) took a hammering during the dot com crash as vendors went out of business almost overnight, the new range of applications are rising like a phoenix from the ashes. Lead by Salesforce.com, which has given SaaS a new respectability by providing mission critical applications online to small businesses, the door is now open for online applications to begin to replace some of the desktop-bound software that you and I currently use.

By Helen Bradley

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Old Faithful vs. New-fangled

A pair of highly anticipated RTS games are trying to take command of your pocketbook. Chad Sapieha sizes them up and sorts them out.

Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

Developer: EA Publisher: EA
ESRB: T for Teen Rating: 4/5

Supreme Commander

Developer: Gas Powered Games Publisher: THQ
ESRB: E 10+ Rating: 4.5/5

Both games were played on a Windows Vista box with a 3.0 GHz Intel Dual Core processor, 2GB of RAM and a 512MB ATI Radeon X1900 XT graphics card and displayed at 1920x1200 on a Dell 2407FPW 24-inch LCD.

Real-time strategy games are often disappointingly similar in design, but there's no confusing two new powerhouse games in the genre - Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars and Supreme Commander.

Tiberium Wars, despite its glossy, modern sheen, is a throwback to early RTS titles: a small-scale strategy game with contrived levels, simplistic tactics and an undeniable old-school appeal. Supreme Commander, on the other hand, is a look at where the genre is headed, an almost pre-posterously epic RTS with massive maps, multifaceted missions and challenging strategy.

Tiberium Wars' campaign is broken in two: one places you in command of the forces of good, as represented by the Global Defense Initiative; the other lets you get your evil on in the form of the Brotherhood of Nod, a group of mad zealots. The story plays out via nearly 90 minutes of live action video and stars a roster of recognizable B-list actors—just like the Command & Conquer games of old.

Mission design brings back memories, too. Some are of the classic construct base/collect resources/build a massive army variety, others fall into the defend-a-position-until-reinforcements-arrive category and the remainder are essentially run 'n' gun levels that see the player hustling about with a small cadre of elite units and no base support.

Don't expect much in the way of new GDI or Nod units or buildings—with few exceptions, the game features familiar attackers like GDI's mammoth tanks and orca aircraft, and recognizable structures such as the Brotherhood's Hand of Nod barracks and secret shrines.

In fact, the only truly significant difference between this latest version and its predecessors—other than its outstanding graphics which, by the way, look lovely even on mid- and low-end machines—is the presence of a new faction. I don't want to ruin the story, so let's just say this novel bloc has some wild, not-of-this-world technology that adds a welcome element of surprise midway through the campaign.

Supreme Commander, on the other hand, is a brand new property, so nearly all of the content feels fresh. But, more than that, it pushes—and, in some cases, breaks through—the boundaries we've come to expect of RTS games (including system requirements—you'll need a powerhouse rig to play it at its highest settings without the frame rate slogging during big battles).

For starters, missions are enormous in every sense of the word. They can last several hours and even span multiple play sessions. This is partly due to the fact that missions are made up of a constant stream of new and changing objectives and partly because the maps are almost foolishly large—the biggest measures about 6500 square kilometers. They're so huge, in fact, that the only way to get a sense of the field of battle is to view it from space—which involves nothing more than scrolling the mouse wheel backwards. This simple innovation eliminates the claustrophobic feeling that plagues most RTS games.

But Supreme Commander's greatest advances lie in the strategy required to achieve victory. Unlike Tiberium Wars, it's not the sort of RTS in which one simply builds an enormous army and sends it swarming like locusts over an enemy stronghold.

An example: in one early mission, I spent nearly an hour building up an intimidating looking army composed of hundreds of advanced units before confidently sending them en masse to attack an enemy base. It didn't go well. My planes were blown apart under a hail of anti-aircraft fire in a matter of a few seconds, and my ground forces' attacks bounced off an impenetrable wall of energy shields. My entire force was decimated in less than five minutes.

I wound up spending more than an hour rebuilding my army and breaking them into groups designed to take out strategic targets in a specific order. The undertaking tested the limits of my endurance and multitasking abilities, but the victory was one of the sweetest I'd ever tasted in an RTS game.

In the end, it might not be fair to compare Supreme Commander to Command & Conquer 3. After all, one is an attempt to reinvigorate the RTS genre, while the other is a loving homage to its roots. And, when all is said and done, they're both a heck of a lot of fun.

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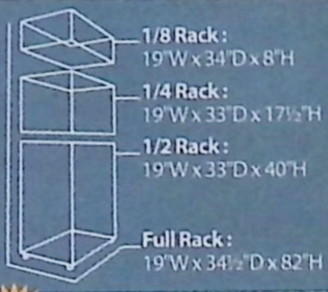

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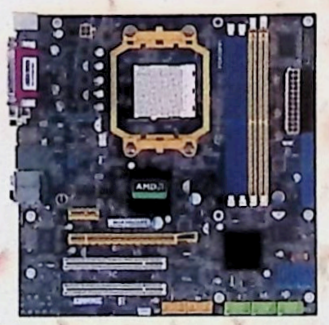

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